



ST CIARÁN'S
COMMUNITY SCHOOL



OMNES VIRTUTEM SEQUENTES

**A resource to help students and
parents / guardians who are
struggling with school attendance**

| Contents | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Promoting Positive Attendance at St. Ciaran's | 3 |
| Reasons your child may stay home | 4 |
| Reasons your child should NOT stay home | 5 |
| Advice for Parents | 8 |
| Understanding school refusal? | 11 |
| When school attendance becomes an issue? | 13 |
| What can a parent/guardian do to help? | 14 |
| Where to go if you are concerned about your child's wellbeing? | 17 |
| Individual School Plan to improve attendance | 23 |



PROMOTING POSITIVE ATTENDANCE AT ST. CIARAN'S

Consistent school attendance is key to developing a love of learning for your child. When children attend school regularly, it can give them a real sense of belonging. This helps them to both learn and succeed.

The aim of this booklet is to help parents / guardians and teachers support positive school attendance. We have also highlighted what to look out for when concerns arise and where you can seek help. We understand the difficulties faced by parents and, as a school, our aim is to offer support and guidance, and work together in the best interests of the child.

According to the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, a child should attend school every day that the school is open. There are very few reasons why children should be legitimately absent from school.

REASONS YOUR CHILD MAY STAY AT HOME

- Sickness such as high fever/vomiting/diarrhoea/difficulty breathing/ contagious illness/ rash or any illness that prevents the child from functioning normally at home or at school. It is always best to seek the advice of a medical practitioner.



- The child is not well enough to participate in class.
- Critical family circumstances e.g., bereavement.
- Medical appointments that cannot be held outside of school hours.

REASONS YOUR CHILD SHOULD **NOT** STAY AT HOME

Unnecessary Absences

- **Holidays:** Plan for holidays during school breaks. Missing classes for trips can disrupt learning and make it harder for children to keep up with their peers.
- **Shopping:** Avoid scheduling shopping trips during school hours. Use weekends or after-school time instead.
- **Birthdays:** While birthdays are special, they should be celebrated outside school hours. Missing school for celebrations sends the wrong message about priorities.
- **Babysitting:** Caring for younger siblings is an adult's responsibility. If necessary, seek external help rather than keeping a child home from school.
- **Events and Shows:** Sporting events, concerts, or social gatherings can wait until after school. Missing classes for these can undermine the importance of education.

Appointments

- **Flexible Scheduling:** Try to book medical, dental, or other appointments before or after school hours. If this isn't

possible, ensure your child returns to school immediately after the appointment.

- **Communication with School:** Inform the school in advance about unavoidable absences and work with teachers to minimise the disruption to learning.
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Sleeping In

- **Late is Better than Absent:** Stress to children that being late occasionally is far better than missing an entire day. This helps instill accountability and reduces the long-term impact of absence.
 - **Address the Cause:** If oversleeping is frequent, evaluate bedtime routines, potential health issues (like sleep disorders), or underlying stress that might be affecting their rest.
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The Bigger Picture

- **Building Habits:** Regular attendance teaches responsibility, time management, and commitment—skills that are critical in adulthood.
- **Academic Progress:** Consistent attendance ensures your child stays on track with their studies, reducing the risk of falling behind or struggling later.
- **Social Development:** School is a vital space for building friendships, teamwork skills, and confidence. Missing school means missing these essential experiences.



By adhering to these guidelines, parents / guardians can set a strong example and reinforce the importance of education, preparing children for a successful future.

Practical advice and actionable strategies:

Importance of Attendance

- **Talk Openly:** Use age-appropriate examples to explain how regular attendance builds skills and opportunities for the future, like getting into college or achieving career goals.
- **Address Reluctance:** Approach concerns empathetically. If issues like bullying or academic struggles are identified, involve the school promptly to create a supportive environment.

Weekday Routine

- **Establish Consistency:** Make bedtime and wake-up routines non-negotiable but flexible enough for occasional adjustments.
- **Prepare Together:** Involve children in nightly preparations to teach responsibility, such as packing their school bag or choosing snacks for lunch.

Backup Plan

- **Build a Network:** Connect with a few reliable individuals who understand your routines and can step in when needed. Share contact details and expectations with them in advance.

Extra-Curricular Involvement

- **Support Interests:** Encourage activities that align with your child's hobbies or help them explore new ones, such as sports, arts, or clubs.
- **Balance Commitments:** Monitor schedules to ensure these activities don't overwhelm their study time or rest.

Praise and Encouragement

- **Celebrate Milestones:** Acknowledge streaks of good attendance with small rewards or family activities to motivate consistent effort.
- **Visual Tracking:** Use a colorful chart or calendar to record attendance and let your child help maintain it.

Promoting a Balanced Lifestyle

- **Healthy Habits:** Encourage nutritious meals and active play, making sure children get at least an hour of exercise daily.
- **Family Time:** Dedicate moments during the week to connect as a family, such as game nights or shared meals, to strengthen bonds and provide emotional support.
- **Screen Time Limits:** Set reasonable limits for digital entertainment to prioritize sleep and other productive activities.

WHAT HELPS IF YOU ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY GETTING YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL

Nip it in bud early.

Be tough and don't give up.

Reach out for help. Talk to the school.

Every child is different: Find out the cause.

Some children want to leave school early but don't give them an option. Stick it out!

Know how many days your child has missed.

Don't give in! Follow through.

Be organised! Get everything ready from the night before. Have their coats and bags at the door, their lunch made and their clothes on the banisters.

Treat it like a military operation in the morning!

Don't give them a choice to stay at home.

Give yourself 15 minutes before the kids get up.

No TV, iPad or phones allowed in the morning.

Keep talking about the importance of school.

Early to bed the night before school, especially after holidays.

Come back to school after doctor/ dentist appointments.

Know how many days your child has missed in school.

Understanding School Refusal

School refusal can stem from a variety of emotional, social, and environmental factors. Identifying and addressing the root cause is key to supporting a child in overcoming this challenge.

Understanding the potential causes may help you reach a workable solution.

Triggers and Causes of School Refusal

1. Major Transitions

- **New School or New Class:** Adjusting to a new environment or academic expectations can be intimidating.
- **Returning After Absence:** A prolonged absence might heighten feelings of isolation or fear of falling behind.
- **Relocation:** Moving house disrupts routines and social connections, leading to feelings of instability.

2. Organisational Challenges

- **Unpreparedness:** Struggling to stay organized (e.g., forgetting homework) can make school overwhelming.
- **Frequent Lateness:** Feeling embarrassed or self-conscious about being late can lead to avoidance.

3. Academic Pressure

- **Fear of Failure:** Worrying about grades or tests can result in reluctance to face the classroom.
- **Overload:** A heavy workload or the perception of insurmountable tasks can trigger avoidance behaviors.

4. Relationship Issues

- **Peer Conflicts:** Bullying or difficulty making friends can create a hostile perception of school.
- **Authority Issues:** Negative interactions with teachers or staff may increase resistance to attending.
- **Family Struggles:** Tension with siblings or strained family dynamics can indirectly influence school-related anxiety.

5. Family and Emotional Instability

- **Parental Separation:** Marital problems or divorce can have an impact on a child's emotional well-being.
- **Trauma:** Loss of a loved one or other traumatic events may lead to heightened school avoidance.

6. Social Anxiety

- **Social Interactions:** Activities like group projects, or lunch breaks can be sources of significant stress.
- **Separation Anxiety:** Fear of leaving parents or carers, especially in younger students, can cause refusal.

7. Attention-Seeking Behaviors

- **Reinforcement from parents / Guardians:** Staying home can feel rewarding if it leads to more attention or avoids responsibilities.
- **Comfort at Home:** Access to relaxing activities (e.g., TV, video games) creates an attractive alternative to school.

HOW TO SPOT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AS AN ISSUE

Common behaviours that children display when they are not happy in school:

- Feeling sick on a Sunday night or Monday morning
- Phantom pains
- Difficulty sleeping at night
- Frequent stomach problems
- Crying, being anxious or fearful
- Refusing to get up
- Not wanting to or slow to put on the uniform
- Delaying tactics in the morning
- Putting off going until the next day
- Bargaining
- Excessively complaining about school, subjects or teachers
- Not wanting to talk about school or get involved in school related activities

SO, WHAT CAN YOU AS A PARENT / GUARDIAN DO TO HELP?



Strategies for Supporting a Child Facing School Refusal

1. Open Communication

- **Listen Actively:** Create a safe space for your child to express concerns. Validate their feelings without judgment to build and maintain trust.
 - **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Avoid leading questions like “Are you worried?” Instead, ask, “Can you tell me about your day?” or “What’s on your mind about school?”
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2. Positive Reinforcement

- **Praise Effort:** Celebrate small achievements, such as getting ready for school or attending a full day. Recognition motivates further effort.
 - **Focus on Progress:** Avoid emphasizing setbacks; instead, highlight how they’re improving over time.
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3. Establish Healthy Routines

- **Bedtime Routine:** Set a consistent bedtime to ensure they get adequate rest, and limit screen use for an hour before sleeping to encourage better sleep hygiene.
 - **Morning Organization:** Prepare uniforms, bags, and lunches the night before to reduce morning stress and delays.
 - **Nutritious Breakfast:** Encourage a healthy breakfast to improve focus and energy levels.
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4. Limit Screen Time

- **Before Bed:** Replace screen time with calming activities, like reading or drawing, to help them wind down.
 - **During School Absence:** Restrict access to games, TV, or other enjoyable activities.
 - **Firm but Kind Approach:** Stay empathetic while maintaining clear expectations about attending school.
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5. Foster Peer Relationships

- **Encourage Social Interactions:** Help your child form bonds outside of school, such as sports, or clubs, to strengthen their sense of community.
 - **Discuss Positive Experiences:** Highlight enjoyable moments with friends to associate school with fun and connection.
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6. Set a Good Example

- **Model Resilience:** Show a positive attitude toward responsibilities, even when they're challenging.
 - **Be United:** Ensure everyone is consistent in their approach to rules, routines, and expectations.
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7. Be Consistent and Supportive

- **Firm but Kind Approach:** Stay empathetic while maintaining clear expectations about attending school.
- **Collaborate with School:** Partner with teachers or counsellor to address specific challenges and provide a supportive environment.
- By combining empathy with structure and clear expectations, parents and guardians can help their children feel supported and confident about returning to school.

If the situation is not improving seek help from the school or family members

WHERE TO GO IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S/TEENAGER'S PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING:

- School staff – Principal, Deputy Principal, Tutor, Class Teacher, Year Head, Attendance Officer, School Guidance Counsellor or Chaplain
- GP – if you have concerns about your child / teenager's mental health / behaviour / wellbeing
- TUSLA Family Support Service
- Educational Welfare Service – statutory agency with responsibility for school attendance
- Primary Community Care Psychology Kells - mild to moderate mental health issues
- Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Navan – moderate to severe mental health concerns



The following is a list of local and national organisations offering help and advice to teenagers and their parents / guardians

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|---|--|
| <p>An information web-site for young people coping with difficulties.</p> | <p>https://www.barnardos.ie/resources/young-people</p> |
| <p>Online bereavement support service for young people.</p> | <p>https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/</p> |
| <p>A HSE website aimed at teenagers giving advice about looking after themselves or others.</p> | <p>http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie/</p> |
| <p>Pieta House provide professional one-to-one therapeutic services to children and adults, who are in suicidal distress, those who engage in self harm, and those bereaved by suicide. All services are provided free of charge and no referral is needed.</p> | <p>1800 247 247 or text HELP to 5144 www.pieta.ie</p> |

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|---|--|
| <p>SOSAD offer support and services for people who are struggling with suicidal ideation, self harming, depression, bereavement, stress and anxiety, or if you simply need to talk.</p> | <p>041 984 8754 046 907 7682</p> <p>www.sosadireland.ie</p> |
| <p>Reachout provides a web-based service that helps young people get through tough times by providing good information on mental health and related issues. It also signposts them to formal and informal supports.</p> | <p>www.reachout.com</p> |
| <p>Bodywhys is the national voluntary organisation supporting people affected by eating disorders. They offer a helpline, face-to-face support groups, online groups and email support.</p> | <p>01 2107906</p> <p>alex@bodywhys.ie</p> <p>www.bodywhys.ie</p> |
| <p>Shine offers a wide range of support services for people living with mental health difficulties and their families.</p> | <p>086 852 5422</p> <p>northeast@shine.ie</p> <p>https://shine.ie/</p> |
| <p>Rainbows is a free, voluntary service for children and young people experiencing loss following bereavement and parental separation.</p> | <p>01 4734175</p> <p>https://www.rainbowsireland.ie/</p> |

| | | |
|---|---------------|--|
| Kells Family Resource Centre offers a confidential, professional and affordable counselling service. | 046 924 7161 | http://kellsresourcecentre.ie/ |
| Citizens Information Centre | 1800 206 506 | www.citizensinformation.ie/en/ |
| The ISPCC operates Teenline, a national active listening service for children and young people up to the age of 18 in Ireland. | 1800 833 634 | www.teenline.ie |
| Samaritans offers emotional support 24/7, to anyone who is in distress, struggling to cope or feeling suicidal. | 116 123 | jo@samaritans.org |
| Doctor On Call | 1850 777 911 | |
| Grow Mental Health is a registered charity and we also deliver Mental Health Education Programmes both within the community and the workplace. | 0 818 474 474 | www.grow.ie |
| Aware is the national organisation providing free support, education and information services to those impacted by anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and related mood conditions. | 1800 804848 | www.aware.ie |

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| Childline: "You can talk with Childline in confidence, about anything that might be on your mind, and we won't judge you, give out to you or tell you what to do. We're here to listen and we'll help you to figure out the best solution for you." | 1800 666 666 | www.childline.ie |
| Spunout is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people. | Text HELLO to 50808 to start a conversation | www.spunout.ie |
| Rutland Centre work to help people with addiction issues. | 01 494 6358 | info@rutlandcentre.ie |
| Outcomers is a social and befriending support group for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) people. | 042 9329816 | http://www.outcomers.org/ |
| Safe Ireland offers support to those suffering domestic abuse. | 1800 341 900 046 9022393 | www.safeireland.ie |
| Addiction Services | | |
| HSE Drug & Alcohol Support Services | 1800 459459 | www.drugs.ie |

| | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| Aiséirí provides community and residential services to help young people, adults and families overcome addiction and lead meaningful lives in recovery. | 052 7441166 | |
| Cavan Drugs Awareness Baileborough | 042 9666983 | |
| Meath Drug Outreach & Counselling Service | 046 9249111 / 9249038 | |
| Widow.ie Bereavement Support for Men and Women (Forum) | | www.widow.ie |

Jigsaw Meath

www.jigsaw.ie

Direct support for young people. Any young person (12 - 25) can come to Jigsaw Meath if they have concerns that they want to talk about. We can provide information, advice, guidance and confidential support. The service is free and confidential. There is no waiting list and you do not need an appointment.

Phone: 046 9071702 Email: meath@jigsaw.ie

Bereavement

Barnardos Children's Bereavement Service

Helpline 01 473 2110 (Monday to Thursday, 10am-12noon)

www.barnardos.ie/what-we-do/specialist-services/bereavement-counselling.html

Email: bereavement@barnardos.ie

Individual Student Plan to improve Attendance



Attendance Action Plan

Name _____

| | |
|---|--|
| How many days have you missed school? | |
| What is your attendance target for the year? (What % of attendance?) | |
| What does that look like? (how many days?) | |

What is your attendance pattern?

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| I am late in the mornings | |
| I have had one long absence | |
| I have had lots of little absences | |

| | |
|---|--|
| I miss a couple of days at school every week | |
| I miss the same day(s) off school each week | |
| Fill in anything else you notice about your absence | |

Tick the boxes that explain your attendance

| | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| I have been on holiday | I can't be bothered to come to school sometimes | I stay up too late sometimes | I don't like my lessons on some days |
| I don't come to school when I fall out with my friends | I mitch from school | I oversleep | I am allowed to stay at home when I want |
| I don't like my teachers on some days | I don't like being in school | I don't come in when I owe homework | I don't come in when I have a detention |
| I don't come in when I have a test | I don't come in when I am worried about something | I feel tired all the time | I feel too nervous or anxious to come to school |
| I have had a long illness. | | I have had lots of little illnesses | |

What do your parents/ guardians say when you say that you're not going to school?

What effect is your attendance having on your grades?

What are YOU going to do to improve your attendance?

1.

2.

3.

What are your PARENTS / GUARDIANS going to do to improve your attendance?

1.

2.

3.

How is the school going to help you to improve your attendance?

1.

2.

3.

When is your review date

| | Targets for improvement | Achieved | Some Improvement | Not Achieved |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |

Parent /Guardian: _____

Student: _____

School: _____

Date: _____