

### What happens when the authorities find truant students?

A police or probation officer may take the student to:

- the student's home and the care of the student's parent
- the student's school and the care of the staff at school
- a truancy service center

If the officer believes a child is a habitual truant who needs protection and services, the officer may require the student to go to juvenile court.

### What Can Parents Do?

You are not alone. Many families are concerned about their children's school attendance, and help is available.

**Talk to the staff at your child's school.** Teachers, principals, counselors, and social workers at your child's school may be able to help you understand why your child is truant. Visit the school if possible to understand what's going on in your child's day.

**Ask the school staff how they can help you.** The district may offer extra programs and services—such as tutoring or alternative settings—that would help your student with attendance.

**Reach out to other family members and friends.** Talk to other parents, especially the parents of your child's friends. They may have information or ideas that can help.

**Connect with professionals for advice.** Community programs, school social workers, family counselors and therapists, and clergy can all offer insight and support.

#### Monitor your child's attendance:

- Request your child's attendance records from your child's school.
- Ask the school to contact you immediately if your child is absent without a valid excuse.
- Periodically check in with your child's teachers to find out how things are going for your student.

# Minnesota Parent Center

Minnesota Parent Center provides individual assistance, information, and training to families and professionals in Minnesota.

We help parents be strong partners in their children's regular education and encourage community involvement to help all children succeed at school. We can answer questions and help you solve school-related problems.

**Do you have more questions about truancy?  
Call Minnesota Parent Center at 612-827-2966**



PACER Center is a parent center for all families of children and young adults. A major focus of PACER is to provide assistance to families of children with disabilities: physical, mental, learning, and emotional. It is based on a parents-helping-parents philosophy.

PACER provides workshops, publications, and other resources to help families make decisions about education, vocational training, employment, and other services for their child or young adult.

#### PACER Center

4826 Chicago Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55417-1098

Voice: (612) 827-2966 • TTY: (612) 827-7770

Fax: (612) 827-3065 • Toll-free: 1-800-537-2237

E-Mail: [pacer@pacer.org](mailto:pacer@pacer.org) • Web site: [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

# Truancy

## A Family Guide to Understanding and Seeking Help for Truancy

## Minnesota Parent Center

# School Attendance Makes a Difference

One of the most important things families can do to help their children succeed is to make sure they attend school regularly.

Students might skip school once or twice on a whim, but when they frequently miss school, they need help. Truancy is often a warning sign that a student is having trouble. Left unchecked, truancy can have strong negative effects on students' lives. It can block future opportunities and lead to drug use, daytime crime, and violence.

Trouble at school is one of the main reasons students become truant. Common reasons for truancy include:

- friends who skip school
- learning problems
- money problems
- drug or alcohol use
- depression
- friendship difficulties
- fear of bullying, harassment, or violence
- language or cultural barriers

Families and schools can work together to find out what's happening. Together they can take steps to help students meet their challenges.

# Five Strategies to Encourage School Attendance

1. Let your children know that you value education. Insist they go to school every day.
2. Talk with your child about school. Is your child struggling with schoolwork, classmates, or other problems? Ask how you can help.
3. Discuss your concerns with your child's teachers. Ask them to help you with a written plan to help your child succeed.
4. Does your child need a tutor or assessment for special services? Ask for referrals to community programs, and don't hesitate to use mediation or counseling services.
5. Get to know your child's friends and their families.

# Excused Absences

Schools know there are times when a student won't be able to attend classes. They allow students to miss class for reasons such as:

- illness
- death of a family member
- doctor appointments that cannot be scheduled after regular school hours
- religious holidays

Because each school has a different way of defining a "valid" or "excused" absence, check with your child's school to find out its definition. Excused absences should be explained in the Student Handbook.

## When your child is absent with a valid excuse:

- Contact the school attendance clerk the day of the absence. State the reason for the absence, and tell when you think your child will return.
- Keep a written record of who you spoke to and the date you called.

## When your child returns to school:

- Make sure you give the school a written note explaining the absence. Keep a copy for yourself.

# Unexcused Absences

When students miss school for other reasons, the absence is unexcused. Schools define unexcused absences in different ways, too, so check the policy at your child's school. Some examples of unexcused absences include:

- staying home to take care of siblings
- missing the school bus
- making doctor appointments that could have been scheduled after regular school hours
- refusing to go to school
- skipping school for the day or for a class period
- working at a job

# When Are Students Truant?

Students are considered truant when they miss school or class without a valid excuse.

In Minnesota, students must attend school until age 16. Teens ages 16 and 17 may lawfully withdraw from school *only if their parents give written permission following a meeting with school personnel*. If teens haven't lawfully withdrawn, they are considered truant.

Students who become truant may be classified as either *continuing* or *habitual* truants, depending on how often they miss school.

## Continuing truants

- *Elementary school*—absent three or more days in the school year without a valid excuse
- *Middle school, junior high school, or high school*—absent for three or more class periods on three or more days in the school year without a valid excuse

When a student becomes a continuing truant, the school must notify the parents immediately.

## Habitual truants

- *Elementary school*—absent for seven or more days without a valid excuse
- *Middle school, junior high school, or high school*—absent for one or more class periods on at least seven school days without a valid excuse

## When a student becomes a habitual truant:

- The school may require the student and his or her parents to go to a school attendance review board or a community mediation program.
- The student may have to go to juvenile court.
- The student's driving license may be suspended, delayed, or restricted.
- Parents may be found guilty of a misdemeanor.
- Parents may be charged with educational neglect. They may also face a Child in Need of Protective Services (CHIPS) petition.