



# REPORT to PARENTS

RP 27:2

## School Anxiety

**E**very child has days when he or she doesn't *want* to go to school. Children suffering from school anxiety, however, feel that they *can't* go to school.

Fortunately, only about two percent of school-age children develop school anxiety, and virtually all of them can learn to overcome it with the help of parents, teachers, and counselors.

**What causes school anxiety?** There are a variety of reasons why a child may feel he or she can't go to school. The most common are the fear of being bullied, test or performance anxiety, and social isolation from classmates.

**Is school anxiety different from being a truant?** Yes. Children who skip school to be defiant are truants. Children who have school anxiety are actually psychologically afraid to go to school.

**How does this problem start?** There usually is some event that launches a child into feeling that he or she cannot attend school. For example, school anxiety could occur after a child has been out of school for a long period; if the child suffers from an illness; if the child is attending a new school; if the child has experienced a huge embarrassment; or if the child is the victim of a bully.

**What if the child complains of medical problems?** Sometimes children feel physically sick even if they aren't. It is important to determine if the source of the sickness is physical or psychological. If the family physician or school nurse rules out physical problems, the child's family and the school must insist that the child keep attending class, and work together to find a solution.

**How long does it last?** That depends on the approach taken to treat the problem. The most important thing is to make sure that the child attends

school every day, even if it is traumatic. The longer they stay home, the harder it is to get them back in school.

**What are the long-term consequences?** If a child doesn't go to school, his grades and peer relationships suffer. This can, if allowed to continue, lead to long-term problems such as getting into college, or even work-related problems far in the future.

**How is school anxiety treated?** It's important that parents and teachers work together to identify what is prompting the school stress. Once the cause is identified, work can begin to find a solution. Usually that means helping a child feel more secure, along with behavior management techniques to teach him or her how to handle difficult situations. Rarely is it necessary to change the child's teacher or school.

**What should we tell the child?** There are three really important points to get across to a child who is experiencing school anxiety:

1. All children must go to school, by law. Staying home is not an option.
2. Their family, teachers, and counselors will work with them to address any of the reasons why they feel they cannot attend school. But the child has to work on it as well.
3. Their family loves them, their school respects them, and everyone understands that they are feeling stressed.

The best path to overcoming school anxiety is recognizing the problem early, working with the teachers and counselors to identify the reasons for avoiding school, and developing a plan of action to help the child overcome it.

