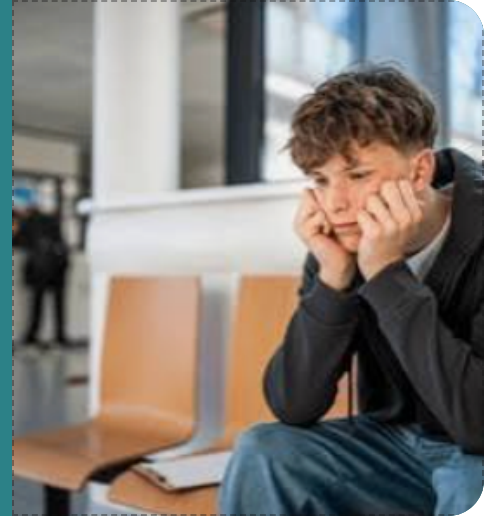


How Parents Can Help a Depressed Teen Ease Back to School

Recognizing the risk factors and warning signs of school avoidance — and what to do next.

● *Avoidance is a symptom, not defiance.*



If mornings in your house have become a battleground of tears, stomach aches, or a bedroom door that will not open, you are not alone. More than 25% of youth will avoid school at some point in their education, and the trend has grown sharply since the pandemic. Depression and anxiety rarely announce themselves — they show up as avoidance, exhaustion, and irritability. Understanding what you are seeing is the first step toward getting your teen back into the classroom, and back to themselves.

Risk Factors WHAT TENDS TO SET IT OFF

- Bullying or difficult social situations
- Family stress, transitions, or major life changes
- Adjusting to a new school, language, or cultural norms
- Academic pressure, learning differences, fear of failure
- Cultural expectations and pressure to perform
- A history of anxiety, depression, or previous absence

Signs to Watch For BEYOND FIRST-DAY JITTERS

IN TEENS

Staying in bed, procrastination, missing or leaving class, social withdrawal, fear of academic or social expectations, and outright refusal to attend.

IN YOUNGER CHILDREN

Stomach aches and headaches, crying at drop-off, refusing to get dressed, nightmares, clinginess, outbursts or new classroom behaviours.

OTHER RED FLAGS

Changes in sleep or appetite. Negative self-talk — "I'm not good enough," "everyone will laugh," "I hate school." Irritability and frequent emotional outbursts. Feeling sick only on school mornings.

Left unaddressed, school avoidance affects grades, friendships, family routines, and a teen's sense of who they are. Early intervention works best — but it is never too late. Read the full article: [School Avoidance & Back-to-School Anxiety](#).

● **Get support early: small concerns are easier to address before they grow.**

What Parents Can Do at Home

- 01 Listen without judgment.** Let them name the fear. Validate it: "I get it, these are hard days — tell me more."
- 02 Stabilize the routine.** Consistent sleep and wake times, bags packed the night before, predictable structure with time for fun.
- 03 Build confidence.** Celebrate small wins. Focus on effort over perfection, not on punishment.
- 04 Model coping skills.** Breathing exercises, journaling, visualization, and mindfulness work better when they see you use them.
- 05 Go back gradually.** Start with a favourite class or partial days, then build up as comfort grows.
- 06 Stay connected to the school.** Speak with teachers and counsellors early about accommodations.

Accommodations to Ask the School For

Gradual re-entry

Shorter days or single periods to start, increasing as comfort builds. Hybrid learning can bridge the gap.

A safe space

A designated quiet room or counsellor's office they can go to without having to explain themselves.

Flexible deadlines

Time off for mental health and extended assignment dates relieve a burden that compounds avoidance.

A trusted adult or peer

A mentor to check in with, plus regular counsellor reviews to catch problems before they escalate.

Build accommodations *with* your teen, not for them. Use age-appropriate language, share the decision-making, and respect their right to decline a strategy that clearly does not fit.

FREE, CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT LINES

Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868 • text CONNECT to 686868

Talk Suicide Canada

1-833-456-4566 • 24/7

Crisis support

911 or 988 for immediate help



Anxiety in one child is felt by the whole family.

Mornings turn tense. Parents carry guilt and frustration, caught between empathy and consequences. Siblings notice the attention and the accommodations. Family therapy gives everyone in the house the same tools — and that is often what restores the calm.

- **Get support early: small concerns are easier to address before they grow.**

Some of Our Specialists Who Work With Youth TEENS, PARENTS & FAMILIES

For over 25 years our clinicians have worked with teenagers who are anxious, refusing school, falling behind academically, or navigating ADHD and learning differences. They are trained in CBT, DBT, ACT, EMDR, Internal Family Systems, Deep Brain Reorienting, graded exposure, mindfulness and art-based approaches, and they assess where avoidance is coming from before building a re-entry plan around it. We work with parents, schools and allied health professionals together, because coordinated care produces the best outcomes for young people.



Karina Karys · MSW, RSW

EMDR & trauma therapist for teens 14+. Trauma, anxiety, depression, PTSD, attachment wounds, perfectionism. English & Polish.



Kerry O'Meara · RP

Teens 11+ and post-secondary students. Teen therapy & school challenges, anger, self-esteem, self-harm. A decade in Child & Youth Care.



Rohama Kabeer · RP

Teens and young adults. Anxiety, attachment issues, depression, stress, relationships and family conflicts, with an added specialization in neurodivergence and ADHD.



Mitra Bissessar · MSW, RSW

Individual, family, couples and youth counselling with a background supporting at-risk youth. CBT, DBT and ACT, plus crisis and case planning.



Andre Johnson · RP

Teens 14+, families and couples navigating trauma, grief, relationships and family concerns. Virtual sessions in English.



Sheri Moghispour · RP

17+ years in grief, loss and life transitions. Family and couples counselling, trauma-informed and attachment-based.

Care is offered in English, Urdu, Polish, Cantonese, Punjabi, Hindi, Turkish, Farsi, Gujarati, Tamil, Mandarin and more.

[Meet the full team →](#)



With parents

Parent coaching and emotion-focused strategies so the work continues at home between sessions.

With schools

Documentation, advocacy and collaboration with teachers and counsellors on custom accommodations.

With allied health

Coordinated care alongside physicians, paediatricians and assessment providers on your teen's team.

Your first 20-minute consultation is free.

Book directly at shantipsychotherapy.janeapp.com, or reach our intake team at intake.shantipsychotherapy@gmail.com

[Book a consultation](#)

- **Get support early: small concerns are easier to address before they grow.**