

School Disengagement Factsheet

What is school disengagement?

School disengagement is when a student doesn't actively participate in class or school activities, is not engaged in subject content, feels as though they don't belong, and/or exhibits inappropriate behaviour that reduces their likelihood of academic success. Boys tend to demonstrate disengagement by being disruptive and engaging in anti-social behaviour whereas girls tend to withdraw and procrastinate.

How common is school disengagement?

Research suggests that 20% of Australian students are disengaged from school. Of this 20%, 10% have low engagement, 7% have very low engagement, and 3% have serious disengagement along with additional challenges such as mental illness.

Why do students become disengaged from school?

- Schoolwork isn't challenging enough
- Schoolwork is too challenging
- Schoolwork is seen as being uninteresting and irrelevant
- Students feel as though they are falling behind in their schoolwork
- Learning difficulties
- Unwilling to seek help
- Conflict with teachers
- Limited opportunities to experience success
- Students feel as though they are unnoticed/don't belong
- Students feel disrespected
- Students feel as though they are being judged by their peers and/or teachers
- Students feel unsafe
- Students don't like following the school rules
- Students are being subjected to bullying
- Friendship/relationship breakdown

What are the signs of school disengagement?

- Lack of interest in school and/or subjects that they previously enjoyed
- High absenteeism
- Often arrive late to school
- Disruptive in class
- Easily distracted
- Non participation in class
- Negative attitude
- Lack of connectedness with teachers and peers
- Unexpected low achievement

Why is school disengagement so important to address?

Students who become disengaged in high school are at a higher risk for:

- Leaving school before Year 12
- Unemployment
- Lower income
- Social exclusion
- Engaging in unhealthy behaviours
- Mental health issues
- Engaging in crime
- Their own children being disengaged from school

How to help your child to become more engaged in school:

- Encourage your child to develop positive relationships with their teachers and peers
- Encourage your child to actively participate in class
- Be actively involved in your child's school – volunteer, attend parent nights, contact your child's teachers about any concerns that you have
- Talk to your child about their future career aspirations. Find out what qualifications they need in order to pursue this career path.
- Talk to your child about what they are learning. Try to link this material to their interests and goals.
- Know what assessments your child has and when they are due
- Praise your child for the effort that they are putting into their school work, the accomplishments that they achieve, and any improvements that you are noticing in their attitude and behaviour
- Teach your child organisational skills
- Make sure that your child has a clutter free study space at home to do their schoolwork
- Make sure that your child comes prepared for the school day with the correct uniform/equipment/attitude
- Encourage your child to pursue extra-curricular activities that they are interested in such as sport/part-time job/volunteer work
- Spend quality time with your son/daughter doing fun activities together
- Take an interest in your child's life - what do they like/dislike/who are their friends
- Remind your child frequently of their strengths. Encourage them to use these strengths in their everyday life.
- Encourage your child to maintain connections with friends who are a positive influence
- Encourage your child to engage in good self-care practices – eating nutritious food/drinking enough water/doing some form of enjoyable activity every day/avoiding technology 1 hour before bed/getting sufficient sleep (including following a set sleeping schedule)/having some down time every day/practicing mindfulness exercises/focussing on what your child is grateful for

- Set boundaries on social media use
- Provide encouragement and affirmation
- Let your child know that you love them (demonstrate this through words of affirmation/gifts/quality time/acts of kindness/hugging them)
- Be a positive role model for your child when it comes to committing to tasks, having a positive attitude, and working hard
- Encourage your child to access online support services such as Headspace, Reach Out and Kids Helpline
- Get professional help from a GP/Psychologist/Counsellor

References:

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