

Problems at School? How to Handle the Top 4 Issues

By [Carole Banks, MSW](#)



At some point as a parent, you will likely be faced with the dreaded email from your child's teacher telling you that your kid has crossed the line and that you need to come in for another conference—or the principal will call to tell you that your teen has missed the last week of school altogether, unbeknownst to you. Maybe you've discovered that your child's grades have plunged from acceptable to barely passing. What's a parent to do? Carole Banks, MSW addresses the top four school problems parents struggle with the most.

1. Acting out in school

When your child acts out in school, it can be worrisome, frustrating and embarrassing. On top of the actual misbehavior, you fear that he'll make a bad name for himself—that his reputation as a troublemaker will follow him from grade to grade. You may also feel judged—and blamed—by teachers and other parents for what your child does at school.

Related content: [Acting Out in School: When Your Child is the Class Troublemaker](#)

Some kids act out when they're feeling left out or left behind. Make sure that your child is capable of doing the class work he is being asked to do, for example. Being behind (or ahead of) the class can create boredom, frustration, and anxiety—which may lead some kids to act out verbally or physically.

Don't Punish Your Child Twice

Try to leave discipline for acting out at school to school officials—don't punish your child twice. In most cases, letting the school hold your child accountable is enough. But in chronic or severe acting-out situations, it is important to work with the school to understand exactly what is going on. You may then need to work with some local support services to address the behavior.

Don't Assume Your Child Will Figure Things Out on His Own

Sometimes parents assume that their kids will figure out things on their own. But if you're dealing with a chronic issue, you have to face facts: your child has not figured it out by himself and he is not likely to do so. *You need to help him.* So talk to the teacher—that's your best first step. You need a sense of why he's acting out and what's happening in order to know how you can help your child change.

Pay close attention to what your child says at home. She should know that all experiences are okay to share. A word of caution: is to support the school authorities in front of your child. If your child hears your criticism of school officials and her teachers, she is likely to be disrespectful to them in class—and also to you.

2. Dropping Grades

If your child's grades are dropping, rule number one is to become an investigator. In other words, really find out what's going on with your child. Is he having problems at home or with other kids at school? Is he having a tough time adjusting to middle school or high school? Are his study habits poor—and can you work on that together? For some kids, learning disabilities and medical problems may play a role. And for still others, drug and alcohol use may be the cause of falling grades. The main thing for you to do is find out the “why” and then come up with a plan to help your child. Here are some steps you can take immediately:

Meet with Your Child's Teacher

Call your child's teacher and ask for a meeting. Tell her what you are seeing at home—and then ask what she has observed in the classroom. Ask her for any ideas she might have to help your child get back on track.

Set up More Structure at Home

A common problem for many kids is a lack of structure in their after-school schedule. Make sure sports or other clubs do not come first, with homework being fit in at the end of the day (when your child is exhausted). This is not a good lesson to teach your child because it gives them the message that play comes before work—and is therefore more important than work. Clubs or sports should not come before school work and family time for your child. The bottom line is that schoolwork has to be prioritized, and a structure has to be set up so it isn't squeezed in at the last minute.

Be Realistic in Your Goals

When you structure your child's study time to help him bring his grades back to an acceptable level, be realistic in your goals. *Remember, it took time for your child to get behind, so you need to allow time for him to catch up.* Get actively involved in your child's homework by reviewing it and helping with study strategies. I also recommend that you try to be present during study time. I know that many parents work and can't be at home with their children after school. As a working parent and grandparent myself, I completely understand and sympathize with that situation. If you or your spouse can't be there, try to

get your child into in an after-school program or ask another trusted adult to be there with them.

Don't Restrict Your Child from Privileges Until His Grades Improve

Understand that restricting your child from all of his privileges until he brings his grades up usually backfires. In effect, you end up taking away something that might actually motivate your child to improve. Instead, I recommend that you require your child to study for a certain amount of time each day to earn those extras that night.

Talk to Your Child About What's Going On

Have a frank conversation with your child about his grades. Say, "Look, I've been letting you manage your homework on your own, but it's not working. Now we're going to set up a study time every day where I supervise your work. No phone and no internet during this time. We can talk about not doing that once your grades get back up where they need to belong. But in the meantime, we have to seriously set aside some time to work on this."

And remember to ask your child about his day and show that you are interested; ask questions that require a longer answer than "yes" or "no." In parent coaching sessions, I've found that when parents really make a consistent effort to keep up with their kids, they are seldom caught unawares when it comes to dropping grades or poor school performance.

3. "I hate my teacher!"

Every so often, your child will have a teacher that he just can't seem to get along with. Sometimes it's a simple personality conflict. Other times, your child is having difficulty responding to authority. It is okay to validate how he feels about his teacher. You *should* allow your child to share with you what it's like in class. Don't tell him he's wrong or that he shouldn't feel a certain way. Once your child has been heard, he'll be more receptive to hearing your ideas about what he can do to make the situation better. But be careful, don't agree with him and say, "Yeah, you're right; your teacher *is* a jerk." When you undermine the teacher's authority, you are giving your child permission to disrespect her.

Learning to Get Along

If your child is old enough, he has to learn to accept the fact that certain teachers require things that he might not agree with. It's a fact of life that not every teacher is able to give your child what he would like to have. It's a fact of life that some teachers are quite strict; they're not warm and fuzzy. As a parent, you definitely would not want to ask them to do their job differently. Instead, work on helping your child. Say something like, "You know, you're going to meet a lot of people in life, and you have to learn how to get along with them. Even though this teacher isn't your favorite, part of your job this year is to get through it, be respectful and do your best. I wonder how we can figure out how to do that?" (There's nothing wrong with asking the teacher for some ideas, as well.)

Meet With the Teacher

If the teacher does seem to be at fault, meet with him or her and share what your child's experience has been. You will want to try to find some middle ground if at all possible. You might also want to bring in another administrator or official, like the school social worker, to this meeting. This will keep things civil and give you some support should you need it later.

4. Skipping School

If your child is skipping school—either playing sick or skipping out of classes—again, you first need to investigate and find out why. Is your child failing, being bullied, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or does he have physical problems?

Anxiety

Some kids develop anxiety around going to school and they can have stomach aches or headaches as a result. Younger kids might cling to parents and cry. A lot of kids will say they're sick in order to avoid school because they have anxiety about it. If there's an anxiety issue at play, a visit to your child's pediatrician to determine whether counseling is in order might be your best course of action. A skilled counselor can gently get your child over the hump and teach them ways of coping with their nervousness around school. So the reason why your child is missing school chronically needs to be understood so it can be resolved. For example, if your child is being bullied, you will need to work with the school to make sure your child is protected and that it stops.

Related content: [Is Your Child Being Bullied? 9 Steps You Can Take as a Parent](#)

Risky Behavior

It's no secret that failing to attend school can lead your child or teen to become involved in risky behaviors, especially if he is not supervised consistently at home. If your child skips school chronically, you may have to involve community services. Ask them to address the underlying reasons for school truancy. The juvenile justice system does not like the idea of kids skipping school and loitering around town, so there may be hope there. You might call up your local police department and say, "I can't get my child to go to school. Are there any resources available in this community to help me get him back on track?"

Understand that if your child is chronically skipping school, it's usually the result of a problem that has built up for quite some time. Often it's the end of a long string of problems, rather than the beginning. For this reason, I believe this is an issue that's important to nip in the bud at an early stage. So when your child's grades start dropping or he's coming home moody and sad, intervene then. Keep the communication open and always stay interested in what's happened to your child from day to day—it will pay off in the end, I promise you.