

Attendance Improvement Planning | FACT SHEET

Purpose

Attendance improvement planning is a collaborative process whereby issues relating to a student's inability to attend school are identified and strategies to increase attendance are determined. An *Attendance Improvement Plan* is the result of the planning process.

The *Attendance Improvement Plan* broadly identifies the specific barriers prohibiting the student from attending school and strategies to address those issues. This may relate to school refusal, school withdrawal, or truancy.

Key Stakeholders

Attendance improvement planning requires collaboration between the student, parents/carers, class teacher/s and other school personnel. It may also involve external support professionals such as psychologists, therapists and/or paediatricians. School executive are provided with documentation and may be involved in the process.

Planning

All areas of school life should be considered as part of the *attendance improvement planning* process. These may include strategies to:

- facilitate a gradual transition to school that builds up to full-time attendance and is achievable
- plan what the student will be doing, where and with whom
- manage expectations regarding completion of school work and assessments
- ensure a key contact person is established for a regular check-in/check-out
- have a student-friendly 'safe place' to go to if needed, e.g. wellbeing centre
- access appropriate external specialists
- support social engagement and interactions with peers as part of the re-entry to school process
- facilitate communication processes between home and school.

An *Attendance Improvement Plan* should be reviewed as regularly as required according to the needs of the student. Ideally the plan would be reviewed fortnightly, but a minimum would be monthly.

The *Graduated Increase Attendance Plan* may also be used for the student to refer to. This plan details the student's timetable and documents the agreed attendance arrangements.

The *Return to School Rubric* may be an alternative plan for students to refer to. The rubric focuses on particular areas of concern that are impacting on the student's attendance at school and can be tailored to their needs.

It is preferable that these meetings are conducted face to face, however in cases where parents/carers are unable to attend, this process can be conducted over the phone. Be aware that if it is necessary to manage this matter by phone, it may be difficult to gauge the parents'/carers' understanding of the issues and their level of commitment to be an active partner in reducing their child's school attendance concerns.

When convening a face-to-face meeting with parents/carers about their child's non-attendance at school, the following guiding questions may assist with the conversation.

Guiding questions for school and family

- What are the strengths, interests and aspirations of the student?
- What are the barriers for the student in attending school full-time?
- What supports and strategies need to be put in place to ensure the student can attend school for the whole school day and who is best placed to implement these proactive strategies?
- What is the pattern of attendance for siblings who may be enrolled at the school?
- Does the student have underlying health conditions?
- Does the student have a disability or learning difficulty? What impact does this have on social and academic participation at school?

If there is a known mental health issue, or there is evidence of an emerging mental health concern, the school should seek consent from the family to liaise/consult with appropriate mental health services or providers. It is information provided by specialist mental health care experts that will guide the attendance expectations and strategies discussed as part of the planning process.

Guiding questions to clarify involvement of external specialist

- Are there any external specialists involved with the student?
- What type of support is the external specialist currently providing the student?
- How often do they see/interact with the student?
- Is the external specialist available to participate in or provide input to the attendance planning process?

Following the meeting, it is important to monitor the student's attendance closely. Depending on the progress, there are a few possible ways in which the case may proceed:

- If the student and parents/carers have meaningfully engaged with the attendance plan, there has been improvement in some of the student's attendance and there is agreement between all parties involved that the matter will be resolved, it would be reasonable in this instance to extend the period of the Attendance Improvement Plan. A graduated return should be maintained first, before increasing the attendance expectations.

Provide positive encouragement and feedback to the student, acknowledging their effort via rewarding the target behaviour of attending school as per the expected plan.

Any new strategies would be negotiated in consultation with the student, parents/carers and school personnel and documented as part of the updated plan.

- If there is limited improvement as per the Attendance Improvement Plan, a review meeting may be convened earlier than previously arranged.