

What is Truancy?

As a general rule, children must attend school from the time they are 6 years old until they are 18 years old. Children are considered truant if they miss more than five days in a semester without a lawful excuse. A child is truant if the days are full or part days missed. The missed days do not have to be in a row.

Generally, schools consider the following reasons to be a lawful excuse for missing school: the child is legitimately sick, there is a family emergency, or it is a religious holiday.

School Attendance and the Responsibility of the Child

While very young children depend upon their parent(s) or guardian for ensuring regular school attendance, the law recognizes that as a child grows older, the child must assume personal responsibility for maintaining good school attendance habits. Missing school because a child 12 or older “didn’t feel like it,” missed the bus, overslept, hanging out in the hallway (late for class) is not a lawful excuse and would be considered truancy.

School Attendance and the Responsibility of Parents

The law requires that a child’s parent or guardian makes sure the child has adequate food, shelter, and goes to school. This

means the parent or guardian must make every effort to make sure the child is appropriately supervised and has enough rest at night. A parent who contributes to a child’s truancy from school can be charged with a misdemeanor. For the first offense parents can be fined \$500 or jailed for 30 days. For the second and subsequent offenses, parents can be fined \$1000 or 90 days in jail.

School Attendance and the Responsibility of Schools

The law requires the school to send a notice of continuing truancy if a child has missed five or more days of school in a semester. Before a school can make a truancy referral to the County Attorney’s Office, the school should do the following:

1. Send written notice of continuing truancy to the parent or guardian.
2. Hold a meeting with the parent to discuss solutions to the student’s truancy.
3. Evaluate whether there are social, emotional, or physical problems which are contributing to the child’s truancy and if so, offer appropriate in-school services or make a referral to a community agency.
4. Provide school-based attendance interventions.

How is a Truancy Case Referred to Juvenile Court?

If your child’s truancy continues, the school will complete a truancy referral form and send it to the Grant County

Juvenile Intake Officer. The case may then be submitted to the District Attorney’s Office for a court appearance and legal action.

What Can You Expect Once You Are in Juvenile Court?

The parent and child are scheduled for a court hearing. Before the hearing, a probation officer or social worker will talk with you and your child about your child’s school attendance problems.

At the hearing, your child will be asked if they admit or deny that they have been truant. If your child admits to truancy, or is found to be truant at trial, the court will make orders to provide services to you and your child through the county’s juvenile probation or social services departments.

These orders could include:

- Counseling for the child or the child’s parent or guardian.
- Evaluation or treatment for mental health issues.
- Community service work or work squad.
- Evaluation or treatment for chemical dependency.
- Completion of a specialized school program.
- Delay or suspension of driving privileges until age 18.
- Payment of a fine up to \$500.
- Out-of-home placement.

Resources SCHOOL

• As a first step, ask about the resources available through your child's school.

• Wisconsin Department of Instruction -
<http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/tadocs.html>

• Wisconsin Statutes -
<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/rsb/Stat.html>

• UW Madison – Finding Effective Solutions to Truancy:
http://uwex.edu/CES/flp/families/whatworks_05.pdf

• National Dropout Prevention Network:
<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>

Tips for Improving School Attendance

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

1. Insist that your child attend school.
2. If your child doesn't want to go to school, find out why. Talk to your child and listen for an answer. Perhaps they have a problem you can help solve. Youth need to know their parents will take action and support them.
3. Know and understand what the school considers to be an excused absence.
4. Don't enable your child to continue to defy the law by calling the school to cover their absence.

5. If your child refuses to go to school, don't be afraid to ask for help. Talk to the staff at your child's school to find out what the problem is. See the "Resources" section in this brochure.
6. Attend school with your child until they are willing to go on their own.
7. Don't be afraid to use mediation or other counseling services. Your child's education is extremely important to their future.
8. Make sure your child obeys curfew laws and gets enough sleep at night. Buy your child an alarm clock.
9. Advocate for your child in the school system.

TIPS FOR YOUTH:

1. Attend school every day, every class, on time. Everyone is good at something. Attend school to discover what makes you special and unique.
2. Surprise your parents or guardian by getting yourself up for school without being told.
3. If you are having problems with peers, friends, parents, teachers or others, talk about it with an adult you trust. Tell an adult what you think you need to make school more successful, and listen without becoming defensive.
4. Advocate for yourself in the school system. Remember, most problems can be solved if you work together with others.

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What you as a Parent Need to Know

This brochure is
designed to help
parents better
understand the issue of
truancy.