

When To Pay Attention To Your Child's School Complaints

from the American Counseling Association

Most children will sometimes say things like, "I don't like school," or "The teachers don't like me" or "I'm just no good at math." Parents tend to ignore such comments as just part of the usual school complaining.

But there are times when what your child is trying to express may be a deeper problem and one with which he or she really needs help. It's important to look for signs like declining grades or grades below expectations that may signal very real problems.

Younger children find it hard to say, "I'm confused" or "I'm feeling inadequate." Preteens and teenagers are often reluctant to admit they're struggling because it makes them look bad exactly when they're trying to appear more adult, responsible and in control. So instead of saying, "I need homework help," it comes out as "I hate school" or "My teacher is out to get me."

When such comments are frequent, they shouldn't be ignored. Nor should other clear signs of real problems. When a child is reluctant to discuss school, seems angry or hostile about homework and studying, or demonstrates a lack of motivation or confidence, these are all signs that complaints about school may have a real basis. Students in such cases may refer to themselves as stupid or incapable of doing the work. They are often withdrawn, hostile to school-related questions, very defensive and afraid of criticism.

When such symptoms appear an important first step is to let your child know you understand and empathize with the difficulties being faced. Try talking about your own school struggles, offering academic assistance, and complimenting cooperation and progress in order to rebuild confidence. If you find you can't effectively assist with homework or studying, and many parents can't, consider a qualified tutor to help overcome the academic problems.

Your child's school counselor should be able to recommend a tutor, but can also help in other ways. He or she has seen similar problems and has the training and experience to offer assistance on how best to help your child. They may even have alternative explanations, from the school's perspective, on why your child is struggling.

School can and should be a positive and enjoyable experience for almost every student. Being alert for when a child is asking for help, even though indirectly, can bring not only better academic success but a happier, better balanced child.

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