

Common Reasons for Truancy:

- Child abuse and neglect
- Family issues – health, finances, conflict
- Child babysitting siblings
- Substance abuse of parent/child
- Teen pregnancy
- Dating violence/control
- Special education needs not identified
- Child feels unsafe at or on way to school
- Parent value on education
- Child deceased

Truancy can be a red flag for abuse and neglect and all school nurses are encouraged to be in the loop on attendance concerns. Truancy is considered a status offense and is handled by the juvenile justice system in some counties and by child protective services in others. The bottom line is that there are compulsory school attendance laws and if a child is not attending school and there is not a legitimate reason, there is a problem that will only get worse if nothing is done. Listed above are some of the common reasons why a child may not be attending school. Whether they are home babysitting younger siblings, are afraid in the school environment or education is just not valued in the family, truancy concerns need to be addressed. **This is particularly important for those of you working in an elementary school.** A young child who misses too much school will fall behind and this sets the stage for future failure. Truancy is the number one predictor of future delinquent behavior.

As a school nurse, it is within your scope of practice to call parents and inquire about any medical concerns that may be causing the child to miss school. If the child's absences are unlawful – meaning the parent has not written a note and there is no legitimate reason given – it is the obligation of the school administration to alert the proper authorities. This can be the local child protective services agency or district court. Someone needs to find out what is going on in this child's life and find a way for the child to receive an education. The last bullet of "child deceased" is based on a case in New York several years ago where no one reported a third grade girl missing several months of school and she was later discovered murdered. This, of course, is the worst case scenario but emphasizes the school district's responsibility in accounting for its students. Get in the attendance loop, be aggressive and call in for back up at the first sign of truancy.

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