

# Implications of Adolescent Absenteeism, Causes, and Long-Term Outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

Adolescent absenteeism is a rising issue in society today; more and more, students are missing school which has the potential to cause detrimental effects on the livelihoods of these students in the short and long term. Research shows that it is not always a behavioral issue; sometimes, students have deeper issues that are affecting their life and routine. Adolescents are often dealing with stress, mental health problems, and family issues. Furthermore, research shows that whether students feel safe and welcomed in their school's environment plays a huge role in absenteeism. Only a couple of absences have the potential to initiate a pattern that can change the outcomes of opportunities, social life, and life in general for these students. Missing school affects more than grades, students who are out a lot often fall behind and lose confidence. Students with frequent absences may also have a harder time maintaining friendships. These struggles can continue after high school leading to potential problems in many aspects of life, however, research consistently indicates that early support works in preventing absenteeism. When school staff or administrations treat absenteeism as an issue that extends beyond behavioral problems, students do better. This is because schools can take the time to build trust, talk with families, and determine the root cause. It is therefore critical that the help is individualized to match the students' needs. When schools step in early and stay consistent, adolescents have a better chance of staying connected and on track which has benefits that last beyond school.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; absenteeism; causes; outcomes; high school

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescent absenteeism is not just about skipping class, it is a combination of social, mental, and physical challenges (1, 2). Research indicates that chronic absenteeism affects roughly 1 in 6 students nationwide and rates have been climbing in recent years (3). Many students miss school because of small issues that slowly

become bigger problems over time causing damage to the life of the student such as throwing off a student's grades, affecting friendships, and leaving them feeling disconnected from school and life in general (4). Over time, these absences can shape how adolescents see themselves in the future (1). Students might begin to doubt what they can achieve or feel unsure about what comes next. The consequences are not just academic as research shows that absenteeism can result in problems such as feeling less satisfied with life and struggling with mental and physical health as adults (4, 5). Therefore, missing school during these important years can affect students long after high school is over.

Even with these effects, absenteeism is still treated as

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if it is just a disciplinary problem instead of a red flag for something deeper (3, 6). Many schools' faculty and staff assume the student simply does not care, but in many cases the student is dealing with challenges they cannot control. Most of the research looks at absenteeism from only one angle: either what causes students to miss school or what happens to them because of it (3). This makes it harder to understand the full story behind why students stop attending. Rarely do studies connect the dots between the reasons adolescents stay home and the long-term impact that it has (3, 4). Because of this, it becomes difficult to understand how early struggles turn into bigger issues later. This gap in knowledge means there is a lack of understanding of the root causes that push adolescents to skip school and that end up shaping their health, jobs, and social lives (4). Without a more complete picture, support systems for these students remain weak.

Therefore, this review focuses on how to better understand absenteeism and its downstream effects (3). The review aims to show why absenteeism deserves more attention and why it cannot be brushed off as a simple behavior issue. The paper will examine causes and the outcomes of adolescent absenteeism, this review intends to show how everything from support in school to the support system outside of school can contribute to absenteeism (6, 7). Many students face pressure from several directions at once, and this combination often makes school attendance difficult. Furthermore, this review also examines how those same forces echo through the personal lives of the students later (4, 5). For example, mental health issues such as depression or anxiety can make adolescents want to avoid school and these feelings can in turn make school feel overwhelming, even when the student wants to do well. Combined with household issues such as financial insecurity or a lack of a supportive or safe school environment, students can stop coming to school to learn (2). When numerous issues are occurring concurrently, it can become even harder for students to keep up.

Together this means that the focus of absenteeism should shift from statistics to an actionable issue to reduce. Absenteeism is a warning sign that a student needs emotional, family, or school support (1, 2). When students know that school faculty and staff understand what they are going through, they are more likely to reach out and ask for help. Reviewing existing research will reveal the overlooked patterns and identify ways to prevent absenteeism by treating it as a public health issue instead of a discipline issue (1, 3, 5). This suggests that

attendance is more than a school issue; it is something that affects the overall well-being of young people. By identifying the real causes, this can set students up for better outcomes in school and in life (4). Addressing absenteeism early can give teenagers a stronger chance at building confidence, forming stable relationships, and reaching their goals in the future. The following review draws on 10 peer-reviewed studies to examine the personal, family, school, and community factors that contribute to absenteeism and the long-term consequences that follow (1).

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Adolescents miss school for many connected reasons (2, 3). One major factor is mental health. Research shows that feeling worried, sad, or stressed contributes to students staying home from school (2, 3). These feelings can build up slowly and make school feel harder each day. In addition to the struggle with mental health, school can feel overwhelming because of friends, classwork, and pressure to perform. When everything piles up, skipping can feel like the only break adolescents get. Skipping in search of a break from the pressures of school and coping with mental health can create a cycle in which grades drop, motivation fades, and friendships weaken (4). Students may not plan to initiate this cycle, but it can happen over time as students fall behind. The more a student is absent from school, the harder it becomes to return, in turn damaging confidence (3). Returning to school after many absences can feel embarrassing or stressful, which can worsen the problem. These issues have the potential to follow teens into adulthood, affecting relationships, jobs, and emotional health long term (4, 5). Therefore, the effects of absenteeism do not stop at school; they have the potential to transcend into many parts of adult life.

## **SCHOOL CLIMATE**

School climate is another important factor influencing school absenteeism. When students feel connected to their school and supported by teachers, they are more likely to attend classes (4). Feeling welcome at school makes school feel like a place where students belong. Supportive teachers and friends help keep students engaged and excited. A little encouragement or attention from an adult at school can make a huge difference. Unsafe or unwelcoming environments have the potential to push students away (2, 3). Students who do not feel

safe, included, or noticed are more likely to stay home. When school faculty and staff build trusting relationships and show students that they notice and care, absenteeism decreases (2, 4). Simple everyday interactions can help students feel that someone is looking out for them.

## **HOME LIFE**

Household conditions also matter. Students facing financial stress, unstable housing, and lower parental involvement are linked to higher absenteeism (6, 7). These pressures can make daily routines unpredictable, in turn making attending school harder. When parents are stressed, school attendance may not be the top concern, as feeding, clothing, and housing their children takes precedence (6). In many cases, parents simply try to survive the day. Some families do not realize long-term effects of missing school (4, 7). Families also may not know that frequent absences have the potential to harm the student's future. Home conflict and weak communication with schools make these concurrent issues even more challenging as these situations can leave students feeling unsupported or unsure where to turn. Attendance improves when schools and families work together and when students feel support (4, 7). When students feel that school faculty and staff are on their side, they are more willing to show up.

## **SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS**

Where a student lives matters as well. Poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, lack of healthcare, and transportation barriers all make school attendance difficult (5, 6). These issues are part of the student's reality and shape how they move through their day. These are community-level problems, not just school-based ones (5). Schools cannot fix these alone because they are tied to larger social conditions, but school counseling offices should work with struggling students and families to find solutions. Families dealing with financial strain struggle to maintain regular attendance, which affects the student's chances of succeeding in school (7). These challenges often pile up and make daily routines harder to manage.

## **LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES**

Missing school does not just complicate a student's day; it can shape their whole future. When students are not in class, they miss out on interactions that build confidence and social awareness. Adolescents who

skip class more often are less likely to go to college or land steady jobs because grades drop, career doors start closing, and social skills diminish resulting in later limited choices for college and career paths (3, 4). Therefore, the trouble does not stop after high school as studies show that adolescents who miss large amounts of school are more likely to run into problems as adults, unstable jobs, money struggles, and feeling lost when it comes to adult life (8). These individuals often feel less connected to their communities, too (8). These issues do not appear out of nowhere, they start small, even in early childhood, and compound over the years (8). The more school a student misses, the wider the gap grows, and the harder it gets to catch up, whether it is in school, at work, or fitting in with others (8). However, rectifying challenging situations early can turn things around before skipping school becomes a habit (2, 5).

Absenteeism can impact mental health for years. Adolescents who skip school due to anxiety or depression often experience worsening symptoms the longer their absence persists (1). It is not just about school, either. Those feelings stick around, and by the time these students are adults, they struggle with confidence, motivation, and just handling work or college (1). Students who miss school early in their education are more likely to miss school later, compiling into more academic and social problems (8). Over time, these habits close doors, making it harder for young adults to find good opportunities (1).

## **EXCUSED VS UNEXCUSED ABSENCES**

Not all absences are the same, and research shows the importance of understanding why a student misses school (1, 6). Some absences are the result of situations outside of a student's control, such as illness, chronic conditions, or appointments; these require support from medical or mental health professionals rather than punishment (5). Other absences come from emotional strain, anxiety, or difficult home environments, which call for counseling, family support, or help rebuilding daily routines, so students feel safe and steady enough to attend again (1, 2). There are also cases where stress builds quietly over time, causing students to fall into patterns of avoidance without ever formally asking for help, which makes it even more important for school faculty and staff to pay attention and follow up with care (1). This nuance highlights the importance for school faculty and staff to understand the reason behind absences and aid in figuring out how to help the student return comfortably and consistently (1). When

the cause is clear, the right resources can be offered, health support, mental-health care, academic adjustments, or communication with parents to build structure at home (6, 7, 9). Taking the time to understand the root of an absence also helps prevent assumptions or mislabeling, since some students who appear “unmotivated” are dealing with stress, fear, or instability that is not obvious on the surface (2). When schools respond with support that matches the student’s situation, it becomes much easier for the student to feel understood, rebuild trust, and return to school with more consistency.

## **EARLY INTERVENTION**

Researchers agree that absenteeism needs thoughtful attention from the moment small issues appear. Schools should track attendance patterns and need to understand the emotional or social reasons behind those patterns (1, 5). Early support helps students feel anchored before bigger problems develop. Peer involvement, family conversations, and simple check-ins from teachers and school staff can make school feel more manageable and less overwhelming (4, 7). These kinds of support remind students that they are part of a community that notices when they are struggling. Many students skip school because of complicated challenges that blend stress, unstable routines, or mental health concerns (1, 2). Strict discipline usually ignores the root problem and can push students further away instead of pulling them back in. When schools and families work together to understand what a student is facing and offer realistic solutions, it becomes easier for the student to rebuild trust and routine (6, 7). With consistent guidance and a safe environment to return to, students are more likely to stay engaged and build stronger long-term outcomes for themselves (4).

Students also come to school more often when they feel safe and supported. A positive school climate and strong relationships with teachers make a difference (4, 9). When students feel that school faculty and staff understand them and care about them, coming to class becomes something they can manage. Good communication with families also helps schools understand what is happening at home. Some families are nervous to share personal struggles, so building trust is important (2). This helps, when administrators are not judgmental on familial situations. When families feel respected, they are more willing to work with the school. Some students avoid school because they feel overwhelmed, not because they want to skip (1). Simple routines and small steps help students return without

feeling embarrassed or lost. Teaching students how to manage stress, stay organized, and ask for help can also make school feel more manageable (4, 9). Attendance can also improve with small supports such as supplying breakfast, transportation help, or helping develop a calm morning routine (2).

Schools can approach absenteeism in several practical ways, but meaningful progress happens when the plan addresses the student’s full situation rather than just the missed days (6). Strong interventions begin with figuring out the specific barriers a student is facing, since academic pressure, social conflict, poor school climate, or health concerns each call for different kinds of help (6). Strengthening school belonging plays a major role, because students who feel connected to their environment tend to show more commitment to attending regularly (10). Schools can also offer predictable routines, safe spaces, and steady adult relationships that reduce stress and help students manage their day. For students dealing with emotional or behavioral challenges, early checks from mental health staff or counselors can prevent absence from turning into a long-term pattern (5, 10). Medical professionals can support this process by reviewing attendance during treatment and coordinating with schools and families to keep students engaged (5). Since long-term patterns of absenteeism form early, schools that respond quickly and adjust their approach as a student’s needs change give that student the best chance to stay stable and on track (8).

## **IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This review may serve as a step towards reducing and preventing adolescent absenteeism by highlighting real world causes and actionable changes schools can make to help students develop patterns of absences. Based on the findings of this review, school administrations should adopt policies and standings on adolescent absenteeism; schools need to show support. The results of this work could be used to develop trainings for teachers and school counselors to identify students developing patterns of absenteeism. In this way, students who have shown patterns of absenteeism can be detected and supported. Teachers could use training to learn how to approach students missing school to effectively develop plans to help them get back on track. Furthermore, if schools were to place mental health resources such as the 988 Hotline number on the back of student ID cards, it would be another layer of support that adolescents need.

The next steps would be further research to support

and test the efficacy of these solutions. For example, a program could be developed to assess if the support of teachers and professionals impacts whether a student struggling with absenteeism attends school or not without the fear of punishment. The findings of this proposed study could show that rather than treating all cases of absence as a behavioral mishap of the student, supporting the student instead can effectively resolve the problem. Furthermore, schools could utilize these findings as a push to support students mentally whether that means creating support, training teachers, hiring professionals, or by making the resources such as the 988 Hotline available. If these results help reduce absenteeism, it may be because students begin to view school as a place where they can get support and help.

### LIMITATIONS

It is important to consider this work in the context of its limitations. One limitation of this review is that it is solely focused on adolescent absenteeism in the United States and specifically high school students; however, the detrimental effects of absenteeism persist among elementary school, middle school, and undergraduate students. Another limitation is that this review focuses on recent findings to provide the most recent research and as such, the proposed solutions for reducing adolescent absenteeism are based on those findings. Therefore, there may be other alternatives, not included in this review, to reduce adolescent absenteeism that have not yet been researched. Finally, there may be other causes of absenteeism not included in this review because they have not yet been the focus of research. As this review is based entirely on previously published literature, no IRB approval or informed consent was required.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, adolescent absenteeism often starts small but can turn into a regular habit and can have substantial detrimental consequences. Absenteeism can hurt a student's social relations, career opportunities, and expose them to mental health risks. However, adolescents miss school for a variety of reasons such as mental health, problems outside of school, or issues at school. Early support from schools, families, and communities can help stop small problems from growing. Treating absenteeism as a sign of bigger issues, not just bad behavior, gives students a better chance to succeed. Helping teens early benefits both them and society.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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