

Good Practices for Tackling School Absenteeism: Family, School, and Community Approaches

Together for Attendance, Together for Success.



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Together for Attendance, Together for Success.

COMMUNITY

School absenteeism is a complex issue that cannot be solved from just one angle, so effective solutions must involve families, schools, and the wider community working together in a coordinated way.

(Kearney, 2008; Heyne et al., 2019).

SCHOOL



FAMILY



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COMMUNITY

At the social and community level, absenteeism must be understood as a broader societal issue linked to equity, opportunity, and social cohesion. Structural factors such as poverty, health inequalities, and social exclusion contribute significantly to patterns of absenteeism (Reid, 2014).

Good practices at this level include coordination with social services, mental health professionals, and community organizations, ensuring that families receive the necessary support to overcome barriers that extend beyond the school's capacity. Collaborative networks strengthen the collective capacity to address the root causes of absenteeism and prevent students from disengaging entirely from education.

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Good Practices for Tackling School Absenteeism

Early intervention (Tier 2)

- Offer motivational community educational support or extracurricular programmes.
- Family and community mediation services in cases of conflict.
- School meal or transport grants for families in financial difficulty.
- Collaboration between schools, local police and municipal services in monitoring cases.

Intensive intervention (Tier 3)

- Activation of local school absenteeism committees (council, social services, school, police officer).
- Referral to intervention programmes for families at risk.
- Coordination with mental health centres, youth associations and NGOs.
- Creation of alternative pathways to social and labour market integration.
- Home-based social support in cases of serious truancy or vulnerability.

Universal prevention (Tier 1)

- Awareness campaigns in municipalities on the importance of school attendance.
- Leisure and sports programmes that reinforce healthy habits and a sense of belonging.
- Accessible and safe school transport in rural or disadvantaged areas.
- Partnerships between schools, parents' associations and cultural/sports associations.

Good Practices for Tackling School Absenteeism

Universal prevention (Tier 1)

- Establish a positive, safe and motivating school environment.
- Systematically monitor attendance (e.g. ÍTACA).
- Raise awareness among students about the importance of attending class.
- Inform families at the beginning of the school year about the consequences and measures taken to combat absenteeism.
- Integrate school attendance as a priority in the School Education Project.

Early intervention (Tier 2)

- Quickly detect patterns of unjustified absences.
- Activate internal absenteeism protocols.
- Develop an individualised attendance plan with specific support measures.
- Apply positive reinforcement in the classroom.
- Temporarily make tasks and assessments more flexible to encourage reintegration.

Intensive intervention (Tier 3)

- Refer the case to the municipal commission or external services.
- Develop a phased and tailored reintegration plan.
- Coordinate weekly with family and external agents to review progress.
- Appoint a reference teacher or mentor within the centre.
- Integrate the student into support groups or more intensive mentoring programmes.
- Provide educational alternatives or second chances if necessary.



SCHOOL

Within the school context, a safe, inclusive, and engaging environment is essential to foster students' sense of belonging and motivation to attend school. Research indicates that students are less likely to miss school when they perceive positive relationships with teachers, peers, and the broader school community (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).

Preventive actions such as promoting a supportive school climate, offering academic and socio-emotional support, and implementing clear attendance monitoring systems are key elements of effective practice. Furthermore, schools play a central role in early detection and intervention, as teachers and staff are best positioned to observe warning signs and respond promptly.

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FAMILY

Good Practices for Tackling School Absenteeism

From the family context, the importance of parental involvement, consistent communication, and the establishment of daily routines are considered as protective factors against absenteeism (Ingul et al., 2019). Parental expectations regarding education, the modeling of positive attitudes toward school, and the creation of a structured home environment all contribute significantly to strengthening children's motivation and sense of responsibility toward attendance. Moreover, when families perceive the school as a supportive and trustworthy partner, they are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving, seek professional help when needed, and maintain consistent communication. In this sense, the family context does not merely serve a preventive function but becomes an active and indispensable agent in sustaining long-term improvements in school attendance.

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Early intervention (Tier 2)

- Collaborate in detecting and analysing the first signs of absenteeism.
- Participate in tripartite meetings with teachers and students to define commitments.
- Sign agreements or attendance contracts with short-term, reviewable goals.
- Establish positive reinforcements at home (family outings, leisure activities).
- Adjust family dynamics that hinder attendance (schedules, transport arrangements).

Intensive intervention (Tier 3)

- Get involved in a plan for gradual reintegration into the school.
- Participate in training programmes for families on absenteeism, adolescence, or coexistence.
- Actively collaborate with social services, psychologists, or therapists in treating root causes.
- Maintain weekly contact with the school to monitor and adjust the plan.
- Take on a co-responsible role in the daily supervision of attendance.

Universal prevention (Tier 1)

- Establish clear daily routines (sleep schedules, meals, preparation of materials).
- Talk positively about the importance of attending school.
- Monitor daily attendance (check diary, talk about the school day).
- Attend meetings with tutors and participate in school activities.
- Maintain fluid communication with the school (mail, telephone, meetings).