

## SCHOOL ISSUES

Issues at school can show up in a number of ways: as poor academic performance, lack of motivation for school, loss of interest in doing school-work, or poor/ problematic relationships with peers or teachers.

### COMMON SIGNS OF SCHOOL PROBLEMS

- A drop in marks in one or more subjects
- A lack of engagement, connection or involvement with school—a child might not be interested in extracurricular activities or have very few friends
- Embarrassment or discomfort when talking about school
- Refusal to talk with you about school, or rarely talking about school with family or friends
- Never or rarely doing homework, or rarely talking about homework
- Low confidence or lack of self-esteem—a child might say she is ‘dumb,’ ‘stupid’ or not as clever as her friends
- Being kept back at lunch time or the end of the school day
- Finding excuses not to go to school or skipping school without your knowledge
- School work is boring or not challenging enough—your child might say he’s not learning anything new

### WHY IT’S IMPORTANT TO PICK UP SCHOOL PROBLEMS EARLY

School problems can also lead to an increased risk of dropping out. They might make children more likely to avoid school and less likely to want to go to school. Poor academic performance is connected with negative long-term consequences such as an

increased risk of absenteeism, leaving school early, and being less likely to undertake further education or training.

Another consequence of problems at school is that children can get tagged with unhelpful labels such as “uninterested,” “easily distracted,” or “doesn’t try hard enough.” Worst of all, young people can often own the label and begin to believe that they are “troublemakers” or “misfits.” All these labels suggest a child is somehow to blame, but school problems are often a sign that systems and support networks around a child aren’t adequate.

Finally, children who have problems at school can experience a reduced sense of belonging. Young people’s success at school depends on their well-being – how they think, feel, and act both in and out of school. Studies have found that fitting in at school and feeling like they belong improve young people’s well-being.

## CAUSES OF SCHOOL PROBLEMS

Personal factors might include:

- Chronic illness
- Intellectual or cognitive disability
- Behavioral or developmental difficulties or disorders
- Mental health issues such as depression or anxiety
- History of abuse and neglect
- Poor self-concept or self-esteem
- Poor communication skills
- Poor social skills
- Difficulty with listening, concentrating or sitting still

School factors might include

- Being bullied
- Disliking, or not feeling connected to, the school culture or environment
- Disliking school subjects, not liking the choice of subjects, or not feeling challenged by the work

- Poor school or academic support, especially in relation to heavy workloads
- Not getting along with teachers or other students at school
- Skipping school because of any of the reasons aforementioned reasons
- Competing demands on time, such as extracurricular activities

Family factors might include

- Parents who aren't involved in their child's education
- A home environment that doesn't or can't adequately support a young person's learning
- Family problems, such as relationship breakdowns
- Competing family or social responsibilities, such as caring for family members, or working outside school hours.

Research has also found a strong link between physical health and academic performance. Some children who have special needs resulting from chronic illness, intellectual disability, or behavioral or developmental difficulties might be more at risk of developing academic problems or difficulties with relationships at school.

A child who misses a lot of school because of a temporary or chronic condition might find it difficult to catch up.

Academic performance might be influenced by reduced self-esteem or changes in peer relationships that are linked to a child's special needs.

Although not every child with special needs will have academic problems, establishing a strong relationship with your child's school early and regularly monitoring your child's progress throughout schooling can help you pick up on early signs of problems.

It's also important to be aware of your child's rights in relation to their education. For more information, read our article on [education rights for children with disabilities](#).

**ACTION TO TAKE: PACIFIC QUEST FOR TREATMENT**

In general, adolescents with significant school problems should undergo educational testing and a mental health evaluation. Specific problems are treated as needed, and general support and encouragement are provided.

When a more immediate action is necessary, wilderness treatment programs like Pacific Quest combine a wilderness experience and some form of treatment. Based on experience, Pacific Quest recommends the Sustainable Growth Wilderness Therapy Model for the most comprehensive approach to school issues and related problems. This model incorporates many of the treatment options to help adolescents achieve lasting change in terms of both behavior and overall physical and emotional well-being. Multi-sensory treatments are critical in maximizing growth, balance, and learning potential, that why Pacific Quest's whole-person, nature-based model works so well. Pacific Quest actually harnesses the power of nature and practices complete wellness, with qualified staff working together on every aspect. PQ works because it is an individualized, comprehensive and neuro-developmentally informed approach. At Pacific Quest, we can design strategies that reach our students and move them through a deep and lasting change process.