

Why Your Child Hates School (Part 1)



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As a special education teacher, I've worked with students across the spectrum—both neurotypical and neurodivergent—who struggle with school. I see the frustration on their faces, the reluctance in their steps, and the exhaustion in their voices when they tell their parents, "I hate school."

If your child has ever said these words, you're not alone. Many parents hear this, and their immediate reaction is concern, frustration, or helplessness. Why does your child feel this way? Is it something specific, or is it just a phase? And most importantly—what can you do about it?

Why Kids Hate School: The Common Reasons

It's Too Hard (or Too Easy)

For many students, schoolwork is either too challenging or not challenging enough.

A child who struggles academically may feel frustrated and defeated, dreading school because it reminds them of their difficulties.

A child who finds the work too easy may feel bored and disengaged, leading to a lack of motivation and even behavior issues.

For Neurodivergent Students: Many neurodivergent students, especially those with learning disabilities, ADHD, or autism, may struggle with processing speed, working memory, or attention, making learning feel overwhelming. Others, particularly gifted students, may feel unchallenged and unmotivated.

What Parents Can Do:

If your child finds school too difficult, work with their teacher to explore accommodations, interventions, or additional support. A 504 Plan or IEP (Individualized Education Plan) may be necessary. If your child is bored, speak with the school about enrichment opportunities, acceleration, or more challenging assignments.

Provide opportunities at home for problem-solving, creativity, and hands-on learning to keep their mind engaged.

Social Struggles and Peer

Relationships

Friendships and social dynamics play a huge role in a child's experience at school. If your child is struggling socially, school can feel like an emotionally exhausting place.

They may feel lonely or left out.

They may experience bullying or exclusion.

They may have trouble understanding social cues or forming friendships.

For Neurodivergent Students: Many neurodivergent children struggle with social communication and may find it difficult to navigate friendships. Sensory sensitivities, misunderstandings, or rigid thinking patterns can also make social interactions stressful.

What Parents Can Do:

Encourage social skills practice through role-playing, books, or structured social activities.

Reach out to teachers or school counselors for support in fostering positive peer interactions.

Connect your child with clubs, hobbies, or activities where they can meet like-minded peers.

Sensory Overload and Anxiety

For some children, especially those with sensory

processing differences or anxiety, the school environment itself can be overwhelming.

Bright lights, loud noises, crowded hallways, and strong smells can make school an overstimulating place.

Unstructured times like recess, lunch, and transitions can be particularly challenging.

Anxiety about grades, expectations, or social interactions can make school feel unsafe.

For Neurodivergent Students: Sensory sensitivities are common among autistic students, students with ADHD, and those with sensory processing disorder. A child may become dysregulated or shut down due to overwhelming stimuli.

What Parents Can Do:

Work with the school to implement sensory-friendly strategies such as noise-canceling headphones, fidget tools, or a quiet space for breaks.

Teach self-regulation strategies like deep breathing, grounding techniques, or movement breaks.

Talk with the teacher about creating a predictable routine to reduce anxiety.

Lack of Connection to Teachers or School Staff

Children need to feel connected to at least one caring adult at school. If they feel unseen, misunderstood, or unsupported, school can become a place of disconnection rather than belonging.

For Neurodivergent Students: Some neurodivergent students struggle with feeling misunderstood by their teachers. They may need alternative communication methods or additional patience from staff.

What Parents Can Do:

Communicate with teachers about your child's needs, interests, and strengths to build a positive relationship.

Encourage your child to find a trusted adult at school, whether it's a teacher, counselor, or support staff member.

If possible, request a mentor or check-in system to provide additional emotional support.

Homework Battles and Academic Pressure

Many children feel overwhelmed by the amount of homework or pressure to perform well in school. This can create stress and lead to avoidance behaviors.

For Neurodivergent Students: Homework can be especially difficult for students with executive functioning challenges, making it hard to initiate, organize, or complete tasks independently.

What Parents Can Do:

Set up a consistent, distraction-free homework routine with built-in breaks.

Focus on effort rather than perfection, and advocate for modified assignments if needed.

Teach executive functioning strategies such as checklists, timers, and visual schedules.

Strategies to Help Your Child Love School Again

Now that we've explored why school may be a struggle, let's focus on solutions.

Advocate for Your Child

Your child needs you to be their voice, especially when they feel unheard or misunderstood. Work closely with teachers, counselors, and administrators to ensure they receive the support they need.

Request meetings if you notice ongoing struggles.

Ask about support services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling.

Work with the school to develop an IEP or 504 Plan if your child qualifies for accommodations.

Focus on Strengths and Interests

Every child has strengths and interests that can help them reconnect with learning.

Find ways to incorporate their passions into their education.

Encourage them to join clubs, extracurricular activities, or special programs that align with their interests.

Praise effort and progress rather than just grades.

Create a Safe Space at Home

Home should be a place of comfort and safety where your child can decompress.

Provide opportunities for downtime and relaxation after school.

Encourage open conversations where your child feels safe sharing their feelings.

Validate their emotions—"I hear that school is tough for you right now. Let's work together to make it better."

Teach Self-Advocacy Skills

Empower your child to express their needs and seek support when necessary.

Teach them how to ask for help from a teacher.

Encourage them to recognize what strategies work best for them (e.g., using fidgets, taking breaks).

Help them practice self-regulation and coping skills.

Normalize Differences and Challenges

Whether your child is neurotypical or neurodivergent, they need to know that struggles with school do not define them.

Teach them that everyone has strengths and challenges.

Encourage a growth mindset—challenges help us grow and learn.

Remind them that their worth is not tied to grades or performance.

Final Thoughts: Turning Struggle into Success

If your child hates school, it's important to listen, validate, and take action. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but by identifying the root cause and implementing targeted strategies, you can help your child feel more confident, supported, and engaged in their education.

Remember, school should not be a place of dread—it should be a place of discovery. With the right support, advocacy, and encouragement, your child can rediscover their love for learning.

If you have concerns about your child's school experience, reach out to their teachers, special education team, or school counselors. You are not alone in this journey, and together, we can make school a place where all children feel seen, heard, and valued.

My next blog post will focus on strategies to help your child love school again.