

Absences & Academic Concerns

What is the issue from the school's standpoint?

- Each student is required to attend school a certain number of days per year in order to advance to the next grade. (Children who are homeschooled have different criteria).
- Children with chronic neurological conditions often have frequent absences or miss part of the school day for tests, appointments, hospitalizations, flare-ups of their neurological condition, or sometimes medicine side effects.
- A child who cannot attend school regularly, who does not feel well at school or home, or has learning needs that are not addressed, will struggle in the classroom.

What do I need to know to help my child?

- Absences:
 - You will need to notify the school each time your child will be absent, late, or leave early and the reason why.
 - If your child is in the ER or has a medical appointment, request an absence note from the care provider at the visit. These are considered “excused absences.”
 - If your child is missing school due to a health condition or struggling in the classroom, discuss your concerns with the pediatric neurology clinic staff.
 - Request a chronic illness letter. This will allow your child to have their medically related absences excused.
 - Depending on your child’s diagnosis, your child may be eligible for special services or accommodations at school through a 504 Plan or IEP (Individualized Education Plan).
- Academic Concerns:
 - Email, write, or call the teachers(s) directly if your child is struggling in school. They may not be aware of your child’s condition, or you may not be aware of an issue in the class.
 - It is helpful to keep a personal record of those you have spoken with regarding your concerns. If the issue persists, your record will show the history of the problem.
 - If the issues continue or become worse, written letters or emails can be helpful as a record of your concerns.
 - Many schools have a system that allows parents to view their child’s homework and grades on a computer. This tool helps the parent keep up to date with assignments. It also helps the parent monitor the child’s progress from week to week.

- Some teachers may be more flexible than others in allowing students to make up missed assignments. In junior high and high school, there are often stricter standards for missed work. If your child is missing work due to absences, the school typically has a written policy on when assignments are due once the child returns to school.
- Some children with neurological conditions may not be able to handle a full workload. This may be due to flare-ups of their condition, a decline in their condition, or a new diagnosis. In these cases, the child may need modified assignments, a shorter school day with tutoring, or both.
- Take advantage of free extra help. Many teachers will offer extra help before or after school. Many schools also offer “peer tutoring” at the school or library. The tutors are usually high school students from one of the Honor Societies.
- If your child is still struggling at school even with extra help, keep in touch with the neurology team about your child’s lack of progress. Your child may need an updated visit or testing.

Resources:

- Your child’s guidance counselor and school nurse may have insight about your child’s condition as it relates to their school progress.
- The neurology clinic nurse, nurse practitioner, and/or neurologist are also good resources.