

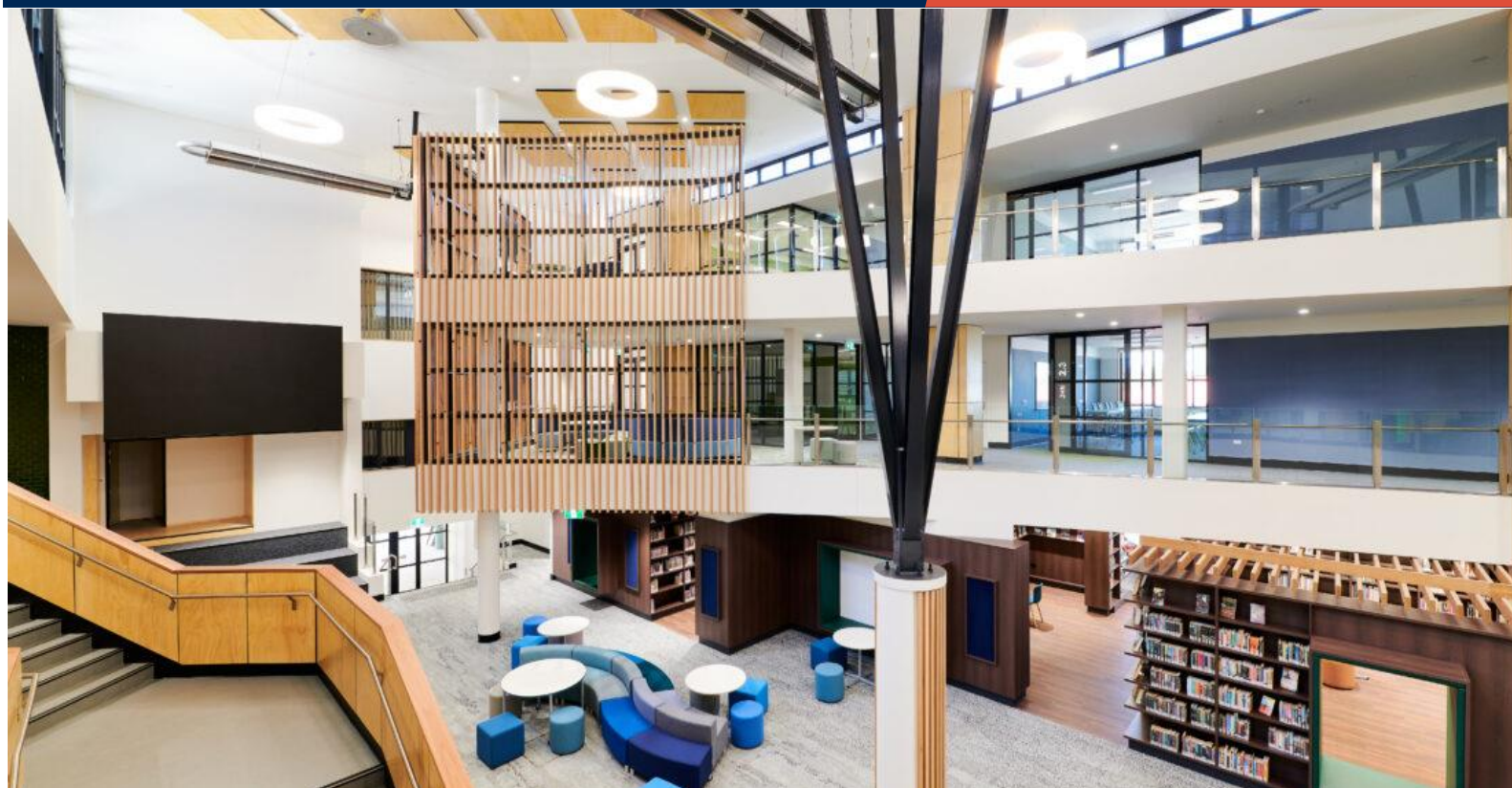


NEWMAN
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A CATHOLIC SCHOOL
EDUCATING IN THE
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School CAN'T

**A guide for parents/guardians in understanding
and supporting 'school refusal'**

Challenge — Collaborate — Create — Celebrate

Overview

We understand that ensuring regular school attendance can sometimes be challenging for children. Recognising and addressing these challenges early on is crucial for their academic progress and overall wellbeing.

At Newman College, we are implementing a new approach called School CAN'T to better understand and support students who may be experiencing challenges with attending school consistently. This framework seeks to identify and address possible underlying reasons for what was previously known as school refusal.

What is School CAN'T?

Everyone experiences a lack of motivation or an unwillingness to go to work from time to time. Young people can experience this feeling relating to school too and this is normal. Sometimes however, the thought of going to school can cause severe distress for a young person and can result in this young person being reluctant to go to school and/or an increase in absenteeism. High level of distress for a young person AND a reluctant to attend school is known as school CAN'T.

School refusal can occur throughout a child's schooling years however, it tends to peak around transition times (such as starting primary school or secondary school, or moving schools). It is estimated that 1% - 5% of Australian students have engaged in school refusal behaviours. It is difficult to accurately calculate the number of young people who experience school CAN'T given the various reasons and behaviours associated with not attending school (Clark, 2023).

Effects of School CAN'T

If a young person is experiencing these high levels of distress AND is also reluctant to attend school, then this can lead to increased absenteeism. School CAN'T can:

- Have a negative impact upon a young person's learning and development.
- Affect friendships and socialisation.
- Result in missed opportunities to connect with others.
- Impact negatively on academic performance.

Causes of School CAN'T

Simon Currigan is the co-host of the podcast School Behaviour Secrets which explores how to best support young people's social, emotional and mental health needs. He is the co-founder of Beacon School Support Ltd. Additionally, he previously worked as a teacher and in special education. In his podcast [How To Support Pupils To Improve Attendance In Your School](#), he discusses six important aspects of School CAN'T, which is represented by the acronym: RAIDED.

Relationships

Relationships play a vital role in a child's school experience. Difficulties with peers or conflicts with teachers can make a child reluctant to attend school. A student might avoid school to escape exclusion, bullying, or they may feel disconnected from classmates, leading to social withdrawal. They might be new to the school (or country) or returning to school after a period of illness and have thoughts about how they will be accepted by their peers.

Anxiety

Anxiety can significantly impact a child's ability to attend school regularly. For example, a student may experience anxiety about academic performance, leading to avoidance of tests or presentations. Anxiety being away from their parents, especially in younger children, can also make mornings difficult as they resist leaving their parents.

Identity

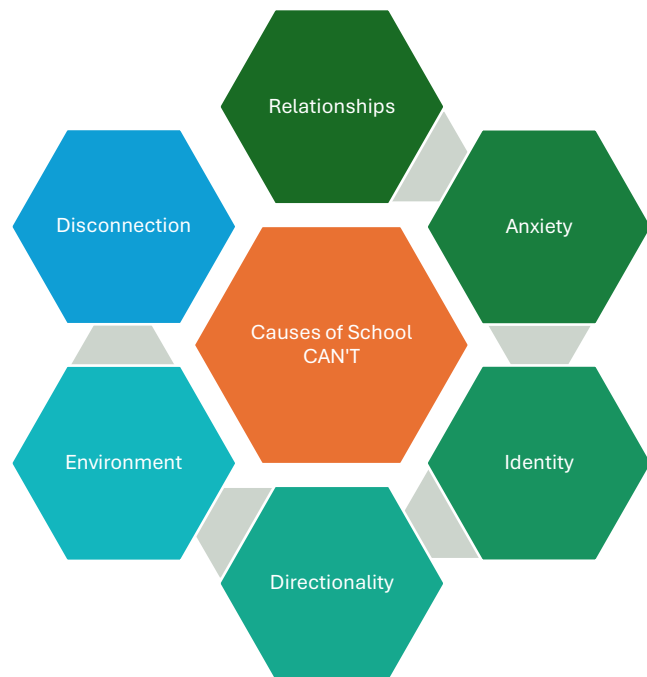
Issues related to identity can influence a child's attendance. For instance, adolescents navigating their identity (and sense of identity at home versus at school) may struggle with their sense of belonging at school. This could manifest as reluctance to participate in activities that require self-expression or as a resistance to conforming to school norms.

Directionality

In which direction is the child being pulled? A lack of clear direction or goals can affect a child's motivation to attend school. For example, a student unsure of their career aspirations may see little value in certain subjects, leading to disengagement. Without a clear path forward, they may lack the motivation to consistently attend classes. Or is there a pull towards home? Due to a situation happening within the home where the child feels pulled to be there? For example, if a parent or caregiver has recently been unwell, a child may worry about something happening to their parent whilst they are at school.

Environment

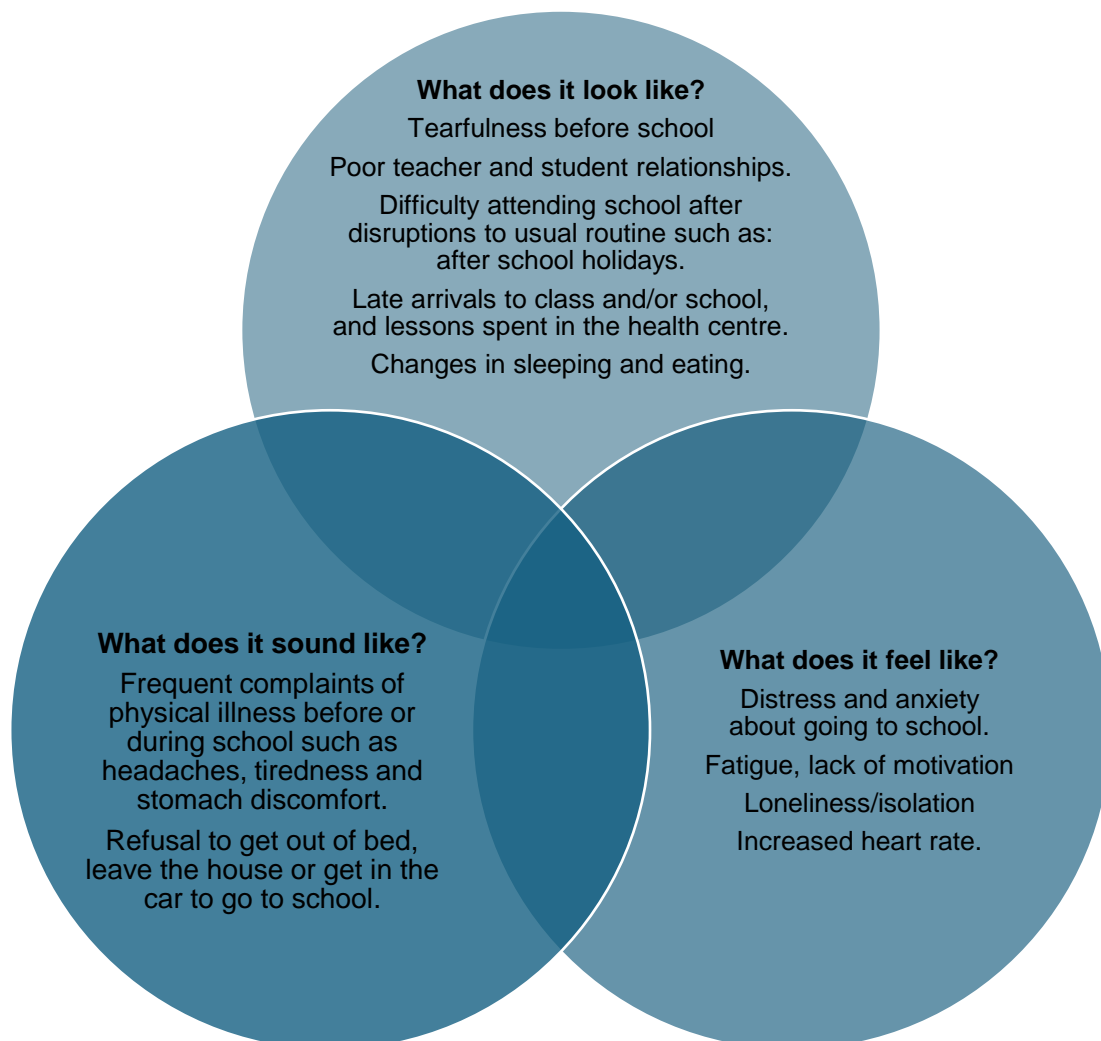
The school environment plays a critical role in a child's attendance. Issues such as uncomfortable physical environments (such as too noisy at certain times of the day), or disruptive classroom dynamics can contribute to reluctance in attending school regularly.



Disconnection

Feelings of disconnection from peers, teachers, or the school community can lead to school can't. For instance, a student who feels misunderstood or excluded may withdraw from school activities and avoid attending altogether. Or perhaps, important people in the student's life talk down about the school or school system or of education as a whole; and the child comes to not value education in a way that allows them to want to attend on a regular basis.

Signs of School CAN'T



The College's Role

Attendance is managed in accordance with the College's Truancy Policy and Student Attendance Policy. Students at Newman College are expected to have an attendance rate of 90% or higher, and reasons must be provided for all student absences. The College will:

- Contact parents/guardians if their child is marked as absent for the first two periods seeking an explanation.
- Monitor student attendance percentages and notify parents/guardians when attendance percentages fall below 90% in a term.

Common Questions

My child is refusing to go to school, what can I do?

- Plan for a calm start to the morning. Do as many preparations as you can the night before.
- Stay calm.
- Praise your child when they demonstrate 'school-ready' behaviours.
- Contact secondaryabsentees@newman.wa.edu.au and notify them that your child will not be attending school and that they are experiencing school CAN'T
- Contact your child's Leader of Wellbeing and share with them the reason for your child's absence.
- Make home 'boring' if they refuse to go to school. No technology, no phones.
- Engage your child in school work while they are at home – aim to mirror their usual timetable for that day.

My child is refusing to go to school, what will the College do?

- Ask you and your child questions about reasons for school refusal, changes in behaviour and/or changes in circumstances.
- Investigate patterns in your child's attendance data.
- Seek feedback from your child's teachers in an effort to support your child and investigate any concerns.
- Implement an attendance plan.

Have other parents/guardians experienced school CAN'T with their children? How did they feel?

Parents of children exhibiting School CAN'T behaviours often express a range of concerns and challenges related to their child's reluctance or refusal to attend school. Here are some common themes parents may struggle with:

- **Frustration and Helplessness:** Parents often feel frustrated when their child consistently refuses to go to school despite their efforts to encourage attendance. They may feel helpless in finding effective solutions to address the underlying reasons for their child's school avoidance.
- **Concern for Academic Performance:** Parents worry about the impact of school nonattendance on their child's academic progress and future opportunities. They may fear that missed classes and assignments will negatively affect their child's grades and educational outcomes.
- **Guilt and Self-Blame:** Some parents blame themselves for their child's school refusal, questioning whether they have done something wrong or missed signs of underlying issues affecting their child's well-being.
- **Challenges in Communication:** Parents may find it difficult to communicate with their child about the reasons behind their reluctance to attend school. They may struggle to understand their child's perspective and feelings, which can hinder effective problem-solving and support.
- **Navigating School Systems:** Parents may face challenges in navigating school systems and accessing appropriate support for their child. They may feel overwhelmed by the process of communicating with school personnel, advocating for their child's needs, and understanding available resources.
- **Impact on Family Dynamics:** School refusal can strain family relationships and routines. Parents may experience tension within the family as they try to manage their child's school attendance issues while balancing work, other children, and household responsibilities.
- **Emotional Toll:** Dealing with their child's school refusal can take an emotional toll on parents, leading to feelings of stress, anxiety, and exhaustion. They may experience a range of emotions, including worry about their child's well-being and frustration with the ongoing challenges.
- **Seeking Professional Help:** Many parents express a desire for professional guidance and support in addressing their child's school refusal. They may seek advice from paediatricians, therapists, or school counsellors to help understand and address the underlying factors contributing to their child's behaviour.

REFERENCES

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