

Dr. Kay:

My son has missed so much school his grades are suffering. He has a serious back problem. It may require surgery. We often have to pull him out of school to visit doctors. How can we help his back, get him back to school, and bring his grades back up?

- David L., Braselton, GA

Prevent Unnecessary Absences

Whenever possible, plan appointments for after school. Every class is important. Your child may indicate that “nothing” is going on in class, but teachers are teaching and students are learning in every class every day. Nothing can take the place of the teacher’s instruction during class time. Each time your student misses class, he is missing instruction intended to help him complete the homework, pass tests, and ace the final exam. If you plan your appointments far enough in advance, you can often get an appointment after school hours.

If the student does have to miss school for an appointment, check your child’s schedule. Find a time that would minimize the impact on his core academics, such as just before lunch, during homeroom, or during his easiest subject. Bring him back right after the appointment. This will keep your child in the classroom during instruction, and provide the best chance to succeed in school.

Provide a note for each absence. A note makes the event an excused absence, which means he can make up the missed work, keeping his grades from being affected by missed work. However, the school limits the number of excuse notes that can be written by a parent, so, when your child goes to a doctor visit, get a doctor’s note. Doctor’s notes may protect parents from possible legal ramifications. For instance, if your son is under 16 years old, compulsory attendance laws state he must attend school. If he accumulates six or more unexcused absences, he is considered truant. As his parents, you could be taken to court and given stiff penalties. Doctor’s notes provide proof to the school, preventing the initial contact with the social worker that could lead to a court case. Save parent notes for the days he is home sick but doesn’t go to a doctor, like the first few days he might have a contagious cold.

If your son requires surgery and will miss a lot of school, talk with his doctor and counselor about Hospital Homebound. This would allow him to complete his work from home and send a qualified teacher to occasionally check on his progress.

With a note from the doctor, you can ask for a second set of textbooks. This will save him from carrying heavy books back and forth. It will also help him to complete any make-up work that requires a textbook.

If you have a question about your child's attendance at school, feel that your child refuses to go to school, or have a question about your child's education, Email Dr. Kay at DrJimK@yahoo.com. Your question and my answer may be published in this magazine.