If children don’t show up for school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers. Preliminary data from a California study found that children who were chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade were far less likely to read proficiently at the end of 3rd grade.

Who is affected

Kindergarten and 1st grade classes often have absenteeism rates as high as those in high school. Many of these absences are excused, but they still add up to lost time in the classroom.

1 in 10 kids
in kindergarten and 1st grade are chronically absent. In some schools, it’s as high as 1 in 4.¹

2 in 10 low income kids
miss too much school. They’re also more likely to suffer academically.²

2.5 in 10 homeless kids
are chronically absent.³

4 in 10 transient kids
miss too much school when families move.²

Why it matters

If children don’t show up for school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers.

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What families can do

Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required shots.

Build regular routines for bed time and the morning.

Talk about the importance of regular attendance and about how your child feels about school.

Don’t permit missing school unless your child is truly sick. Use a thermometer to check for a fever. Remember that stomach aches and headaches may be signs of anxiety.

Avoid medical appointments and extended trips when school is in session.

Keep a chart recording your child’s attendance at home. At the end of the week, talk with your child about what you see.

Develop back up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Ask a family member, neighbor or another parent for help.

Seek support from school staff or community groups to help with transportation, health problems, or no safe path to school.

Who Can Read on Grade Level After 3rd Grade?³

- 84% of kids with good attendance in K and 1st (missed 9 or fewer days both years)
- 42% of kids with at-risk attendance (missed more than 9 days both years)
- 41% of kids chronically absent in K or 1st (missed 18 or more days one year)
- 17% of kids chronically absent in K and 1st (missed 18 or more days both years)

² Chronic Absence in Utah, Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah, 2012.

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