

TAGS: Parenting; School Issues

When Your Child Hates School

Almost nothing is worse for a parent than a child who hates school or is struggling in a school that is not a good fit. If you talk with any group of parents to school-aged children, you'll hear from many of them that navigating the school system is one of the hardest parenting challenges that they face.

In this culture that so highly prizes academic success, it can feel like the weight of the world or at least the weight of their future success and happiness depends upon how well you handle the issues. You are not alone in that worry. Do any of these questions sound familiar?

- How can I help my child get the best education possible?
- What exactly is the *best* education for this child?
- Will my child make friends and learn social skills?
- Would medication be the magic pill that will make all the problems go away?
- This teacher doesn't seem to like my kid, but is that reason enough to make a change?
- What the hell should I do about standardized testing that I'm pretty sure my child will not pass?
- Will my child get into college?
- Is college even the *best* option for my child?
- Is this kid ever going to "succeed" or is she going to be living in my basement and eating out of my fridge for the rest of her life?
- Are my expectations for what the school can do unrealistic?
- Will my child be beaten down by the very system that is supposed to be preparing him for his future?

The Invisible Legacy of Abuse and Neglect

Many families face learning disabilities (also called learning differences) while other families are dealing with behavioral issues. Regarding the school setting, it seems to be considered "lucky" when a child's issues are mostly academic. At least no one ever suggests that if they just tried harder or parented differently that the "problems" would go away.

Many parents, especially if their child has experienced abuse, neglect, trauma, or prenatal drug or alcohol exposure, face the problem that the school thinks their child is unwilling to fit into the system or unwilling to behave properly when in fact they are unable to do so. The difference between unwilling and unable is huge. **The legacy of trauma becomes the invisible disability.**

Put Your Family Relationship Before School Success

Most five year-olds love everything about school. The love their teacher, their backpacks and lunch boxes, and their friends. For some kiddos, somewhere along the line, this slowly begins to change. Most kids can only face so much failure before they start feeling stupid and become resistant to school and learning. They turn a 15-minute homework assignment into a 2-hour battle; they drag their feet getting ready for school, making everyone late. It's enough to break your heart. Truthfully, it's enough to break your spirit.

How to Help a Child Who Hates School

[This Creating a Family show](#) is a great resource in understanding how to help a child who is struggling with school, featuring the wisdom of Heather Forbes, author of *Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control*, and *Help for Billy: A Beyond Consequences Approach to Helping Challenging Children in the Classroom*, on how to handle children who become resistant to school.

Her bottom line is that the family relationships come first. **When school and homework become a battle, put your relationship with your child first.** Our [partners at C.A.S.E. have created this tip sheet](#) to help you build a healthy connection with your child if this is an area in which you struggle.

Constantly Reevaluate Your School Options

Many adoptive parents bear battle scars of having fought the school systems for our kids. One suggestion to consider is what Dawn Davenport, of [Creating a Family](#) calls “taking the buffet approach” to school: each year (and sometimes during the year) she and her husband evaluated what was best for their kids, and were willing to switch schools when necessary. That included choosing to homeschool for a time when that felt right.

Another suggestion is to consider what supports and services are available to your child and what should be considered to help your child. Sometimes navigating FAPE, IEP’s, 504’s, and other alphabet-soup services is daunting. [NACAC offers this summary of School & Adoption: Navigating IEP’s, IDEA, and Special Services](#) to help you understand your rights as a parent.

It’s important that you learn about advocating for your student, but it is equally vital to find a safe place to be supported as a parent. That might be a group of friends who are in similar circumstances or it might be a support group. It will be very good to be reminded by those folks that you are not alone in parenting a child who struggles with school.