

Why “I’ll Go Tomorrow” Isn’t Working: What Nobody Tells Students About Missing School

Why This Resource Matters

You know the chronic absenteeism numbers. You've seen the data. You've tried interventions, sent letters home, and made phone calls. But most attendance resources talk ABOUT students: analyzing them, tracking them, intervening on them. They rarely talk TO students.

Here's what the data tells us:

Chronic absenteeism **increases by more than 50%** between fifth and eighth grade, and continues to climb through high school

● **One in four** middle school students reports being bullied; in high school, that number ranges from 19% to 40% depending on demographic group

Only 50% of students have a trusted adult at school they can turn to when they have a problem

That last statistic matters most. Because when you hand a student this guide, you're not just giving them a worksheet. You're telling them you're that trusted adult. You're telling them they matter. And that you care when they're not at school.

What Makes This Different

Attendance Is Academic: What Nobody Told You About Missing School is a student-facing guide that validates the real reasons kids miss school (anxiety, family responsibilities, safety concerns, lost motivation) while giving them agency to change their situation. **It's a tool that acknowledges their reality and asks them to problem-solve alongside you.**

How to Use This Guide

This resource works in multiple settings:

- ➔ **One-on-one counseling sessions:** Work through scenarios with individual students
- ➔ **Small advisory groups:** Students discuss scenarios in safe peer groups
- ➔ **Conference breakout sessions:** Educators and students explore solutions together
- ➔ **Send-home resource:** For students to reflect on independently, with you as their follow-up support

What This Guide Does

- Opens honest conversations about attendance barriers
- Helps students identify concrete next steps
- Positions you as a trusted adult who sees them
- Gives students language to ask for what they need

What Success Looks Like



Success might look like a student showing up one more day this week.

It might look like a student finally telling you what's really going on. It might look like a student filling out the tracker for three days straight, then stopping, then starting again.

This is about progress, not perfection. This is about opening doors, not fixing everything at once.

When you give this guide to a student, you're telling them: I see you. I care that you're here. I want to help you figure this out. That makes you their trusted adult. Be ready for that conversation.

Facilitating the Protocol

Before You Start

- ✔ Print copies of the student guide OR share a link to the digital version
- ✔ Set up computers if using the digital tracker
- ✔ Provide pencils/pens for the worksheet
- ✔ Optional: white board/paper for group share-out

Setup: Choose Your Format

- ➔ **Individual:** Student works through independently, you debrief together (30 minutes)
- ➔ **Small group (3-5 students):** Students pick scenarios, discuss in pairs/groups, share back (45 minutes)
- ➔ **Whole group/advisory:** Facilitate as a full group discussion (45 minutes)
- ➔ **Conference breakout:** Mix of students and educators problem-solving together (60 minutes)

How to Facilitate

Part 1: Introduction (5 minutes)

Say something like: "We're going to look at real reasons kids miss school and figure out what could actually help. These are situations real students deal with. You might see yourself in one of these, or you might have your own reason. You don't have to share anything you don't want to."

Part 2: Individual Work (10-15 minutes)

- ✔ Students read the four scenarios on pages 2
- ✔ Each student picks one that resonates (or thinks about their own situation)
- ✔ They fill out the quadrant grid independently

Part 3: Small Group Discussion (10-15 minutes)

(Skip if working one-on-one)

Group students who picked the same scenario. Have them discuss:

- ➔ What did you put down that was similar?
- ➔ Which box was hardest to fill out?
- ➔ If this kid could only try ONE thing, what should it be?

Part 4: Whole Group Share (5-10 minutes)

(Skip if working one-on-one)

Bring everyone back together. Ask:

- ➔ What's something that would help THIS situation but would probably help other situations too?
- ➔ Did anything surprise you about what people came up with?
- ➔ What keeps coming up that schools could actually do something about?

Part 5: Personal Action Planning (5 minutes)

Students turn to page 3 ("Your Turn: Make Your Plan"):





- ➔ What's one thing YOU could actually try this week?
- ➔ Who's one person you could talk to?
- Optional: Introduce the "Where I'm At Today" tracker for ongoing use.*

Sample Responses for Each Scenario

Use these as a reference if students get stuck or need prompting. Don't hand these out – the goal is for students to generate their own ideas.





STUDENT

Maya: Anxiety about being behind

<p>What could the SCHOOL do to help?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check in privately, not in front of class• Break missed work into smaller chunks• Offer a "soft landing" - come to the office first, then class• Assign a peer buddy to help catch up	<p>What could PARENTS/FAMILY do?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Believe her when she says she's anxious• Help her connect with a counselor or therapist• Walk her into school the first day back• Ask what she needs instead of lecturing
<p>What could FRIENDS do?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Text her notes from class• Sit with her at lunch first day back• Don't make a big deal about her being gone• Invite her to study together	<p>What could MAYA do?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Come back on a "light" day to start• Talk to one trusted adult• Show up for one class, even if not the whole day• Try one coping strategy when anxiety hits

STUDENT

Jordan: Family responsibilities

<p>What could the SCHOOL do to help?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjust his schedule so he can arrive late• Excuse tardies when he's caring for family• Offer remote options for morning classes• Connect family with community resources	<p>What could PARENTS/FAMILY do?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look into after-school care for a younger sibling• Ask relatives or neighbors for help• Talk to the school about what support exists• Let Jordan be a kid sometimes, not always the helper
<p>What could FRIENDS do?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Catch him up on what he missed• Don't give him a hard time about being late• Offer to study with him after school• Understand that he has real responsibilities	<p>What could JORDAN do?</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talk to a counselor about what's really going on• Ask the school if his schedule can be adjusted• Use the tracker to show the pattern• Talk to mom about getting help

STUDENT

Alex: Bullying and safety

<p>What could the SCHOOL do to help?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take bullying reports seriously the first time• Monitor hallways and buses more closely• Move classes so they avoid the bullies• Assign a trusted adult they can go to	<p>What could PARENTS/FAMILY do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Believe them when they say it's not safe• Contact the school and push for action• Ask what would help instead of "just ignore it"• Consider therapy if they need support processing
<p>What could FRIENDS do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walk with them in hallways• Sit with them on the bus• Stand up to bullies or get help• Check in regularly	<p>What could ALEX do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell a trusted adult exactly what's happening• Document incidents (dates, what happened)• Ask to switch classes/bus route if possible• Find one place at school that feels safe

STUDENT

Sam: Lost motivation

<p>What could the SCHOOL do to help?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check in - notice when they're there• Connect classwork to things Sam cares about• Assign a mentor or advisor• Celebrate small wins when they show up	<p>What could PARENTS/FAMILY do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask what's really going on, not just "try harder"• Help them see what's possible after graduation• Talk about their future and what they want• Don't give up on them even if they've given up
<p>What could FRIENDS do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite them to things, even if they say no• Tell them they're missed when they're gone• Help them see what they're good at• Don't let them disappear completely	<p>What could SAM do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show up one more day this week• Talk to one person about what's going on• Pick one class that matters and focus there• Set one small goal and try to hit it

What Happens Next

When a student fills out this guide, they're doing more than a worksheet. They're naming what's hard. They're thinking about solutions. They're trusting you enough to be honest.

Your job is to be the adult who sees them, believes them, and helps them take one next step. You don't have to fix everything.

Start with one student. Try this protocol with one small group. Send it home with one kid who's been missing. See what happens.

Attendance means showing up. It also means students knowing someone will notice if they don't. **Thank you for being that someone.**


Dr. Kara Stern, Director of Education, SchoolStatus