

What is school disengagement?

What is educational disengagement?

It may be a pattern of absenteeism, school refusal, truancy or school withdrawing. While disengaged is the official term for disconnection from school, students who are disengaged may be described as 'at risk', 'disaffected', 'truanting' or skipping school. School disengagement is usually defined as the opposite of engagement. These two concepts may be considered as two ends of a spectrum. Depending on circumstance or the day, students may occupy different places on this spectrum and move up and down. The spectrum below provides discussion points.

What are the risks of disengagement?

Disengagement interferes with social and emotional wellbeing. Disengaged students are at risk of adverse social and educational outcomes. Though not all disengaged students will leave school early, those that do are at greater risk of:

- Lower earning power
- Higher risk of unemployment
- Social exclusion
- Risky health behaviours
- Engaging in crime

Identifying Student Disengagement

Students can be disengaged with different things: content, class, peers, the school community or with school in general. These different levels of disengagement then generate different indicators such as:

- Poor attendance
- Consistent lateness
- Poor concentration
- Negative interaction with peers



High attention motivation

Positive participation

Attention but low commitment

Avoiding challenges

Low attention /withdrawn

Negative participation /acting out

Skipping classes

Non attendance

3% of all students

have persistent serious disengagement with additional challenges. eg. mental health distress

Commissioner for Children & Young People, WA, 2015

Risk factors outside of school

When responding to disengagement, the context beyond the educational setting is equally important. Things like family breakdown and instability of accommodation, may affect a student's engagement.

Research tells us

- Disengagement is both a process and outcome eg. absenteeism may indicate disengagement from school but is also a risk factor for other disengagement indicators like early school leaving.
- Early intervention is important! The more time a student is away from school, the more difficult it is to get them back.

Educational disengagement can involve:

- The avoidance of negative stimuli (e.g. test anxiety or escape from bullying)
- Seeking positive stimuli (e.g. attention seeking/seeking more rewarding experiences)

Student Disengagement Screening Tool

The reasons behind school disengagement are often complex. Students may not be able to talk easily about why they are disengaged. This checklist is designed to elicit conversation and information about factors that may or may not be influencing their engagement in order to plan a wholistic response.

Student Initials	
Completed By	
Date Completed	

School-Based Behaviours <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Diagnosed or strongly suspected learning difficulty/disability	
Spectrum/developmental delays	
Poor attendance	
Negative interaction with peers (including isolation/friends expressing concern)	
Dropping out of extracurricular activities they have previously enjoyed	
Poor concentration in class	
Deterioration of quality/quantity of work	
Dishevelled appearance	
Poor personal hygiene	
Consistently appearing tired or weary	
Consistently late to school/class	
Change in school-based behaviours and in classroom (including aggression, frustration, irritability)	
Stating they want to leave school	
Difficulty with numeracy and literacy	
Self injury (hair pulling/scratching)	
Sexualised behaviours	
Risk taking behaviour	
Disordered habits around eating/food	

External Risk Factors <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
At Risk of/experiencing homelessness*	
Living in transitional housing*	
Family breakdown	
Bullying victim or perpetrator	
Financial difficulty	
Health - physical	
Pregnancy, current or recent	
Mental Health diagnosis*	
Parent with a chronic health issue	
Student alcohol/drug use*	
Parent or family member alcohol/drug use	
Performs carer duties for a parent, sibling or other family member	
Seeking alternative learning setting	
Legal issues; fines, justice, assault*	
Significant grief/loss experience	
Other:	

Next Steps:

1	
2	
3	

Critical Risk Factors <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Sibling who has disengaged	
Low resilience	
Low family/parental engagement with school	
Other service involvement (e.g. DHHS Child Protection, Court Orders)	
Issues have been present for a year or more	
Anxiety traits (anxious/fearful/avoidant presentation)	
Living out of home	

DET Supports	
Navigator	8765 5600
Lookout (Murray Geddes)	0419 537 764
Health, Wellbeing & Specialist Services	DET 8765 5600



Crisis Response		
Mental Health	CYMHS Triage	8552 0555
Crisis Accom	Launch Housing	1800 825 955
Family Violence	Launch Housing	1800 015 188
Victoria Police	000	

Referral (Specialist Service/Secondary Consult)		
Housing	Launch Housing	9537 7711
	Salvation Army Crisis Services	1800 627 727
	Star Health IHSY Nurse	0434 316 921
AOD	Odyssey House (Rene)	0408 364 178
	Taskforce	9532 0811
Mental Health	Headspace	9076 7500

Referral (Generalist Support Service for Case Management)	
Stonnington Youth Services	8290 7020
Port Phillip Youth and Middle Years Services	9209 6872
Glen Eira Youth Services	9524 3676

School Supported Interventions
Support to maintain school engagement through:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material aid, SSR _____ • Work and education pathway planning, • Next SSG/PSG is _____ • One off referral or information
www.childandyouthdirectory.com.au

* Specialist services need to be considered.