



“IS MY CHILD SICK ENOUGH TO STAY HOME FROM SCHOOL?”

It is difficult at times to know whether or not to send a child to school when he or she complains of not feeling well. However, there are a few symptoms that definitely indicate that the child needs to remain at home:

- 1. Vomiting and/or diarrhea during the past 24 hours*
- 2. Fever above 100 degrees during the past 24 hours*
- 3. An unidentified rash*
- 4. Open sores (minor sores must be covered with a dressing while the child is in school)*
- 5. Communicable diseases*

Though children with colds without fever are not required to stay home, parents are encouraged to keep the child at home if he/she truly does not feel well. Children who do not feel well do not learn well. They are contagious to others and are themselves more susceptible to picking up additional infections.

Children who complain of stomachaches and headache in the morning just before school are more difficult to evaluate. First, take the child's temperature. If the temperature is normal, if the child has not been ill for the past 24 hours and if no one at home has been ill with similar symptoms, then the child can probably be sent on to school.

Avoid telling the child “Go on to school and try it. If you still feel bad later, call me.” This gives the child permission to feel bad and an excuse to come home. A more positive statement would be, “You don't have a fever and you have been OK the past 24 hours. Eat some breakfast, then go on to school and I'm sure you will be fine.” This lets the child know that you have paid attention to his/her complaints, and leaves them with a positive message about feeling good.

Making sure that children eat a good breakfast will reduce the headaches and stomachaches that children frequently develop at school during the mid-morning.

Children with chronic stomachaches present a different problem. When the doctor has determined that there is no physical reason for the stomachaches, studies have shown that their recurring stomach complaints are often hallmarks of other problems. In a study done at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, investigators found that children with chronic stomach aches tend to suffer from anxiety, internalize their problems rather than express them, and come from families where stomach ailments are common. Investigators suggested that methods for dealing with anxiety would be beneficial for these children.

- Spend extra time with your child listening to and acknowledging his/her thoughts and feelings.*
- Structure situations to help the child experience feelings of success not failure.*
- Give your child a feeling of reasonable control over his/her life.*
- Reinforce your child as lovable and capable.*
- Model a positive view of yourself to your children*
- Model a positive view of school and the learning process*

These are helpful methods to use to build self-esteem in any child. All children need to hear every day that their parent likes, loves, and thinks well of them. Children never get tired of hearing how glad you are that you are the parent of such a special child.

Children who show their anxiety through physical symptoms have an even greater need for plenty of positive reinforcement and encouragement to help them deal effectively in their world.