THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Protecting Attendance When Home Life Changes

Educational & Scholarship Pathways · School Success

Practical ways to keep a child in school consistently through disruption, moves, and hard weeks.

IN THIS GUIDE

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A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

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THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Attendance is the quietest predictor of how a school year goes. Missing two days a month does not feel like a crisis in any single week, but across a year it is roughly eighteen days — nearly four school weeks — and the gap shows up in grades long before anyone connects the two.

When a household changes, attendance is usually the first thing to slip, and rarely because anyone stopped caring. The car broke down. The bus route changed after a move. There is a court date. A child who is anxious about school found that staying home works. A caregiver working nights cannot get up at 6:30 every morning.

Those are logistics problems and emotional problems, not discipline problems, and they respond to logistics and emotional solutions. This lesson is about protecting attendance through a hard stretch without pretending the stretch is not happening.

FIND OUT WHERE YOU ACTUALLY STAND

Start with the number. Most schools track attendance in the online portal, and most families have never looked at it. Ask the front office or check the portal for the year-to-date count of absences and tardies, and whether any are marked unexcused.

The number is often different from what families expect in both directions. Some caregivers discover the count is lower than they feared. Others discover that half-days, late arrivals, or a stretch during a move were recorded in a way nobody explained.

If something is recorded wrong, ask how to correct it and what documentation the school needs. Corrections are ordinary and schools handle them routinely, but they generally have a time limit.

SEPARATE THE THREE REASONS A STUDENT MISSES SCHOOL

Logistics: no ride, no bus pass, an alarm that nobody hears, a younger sibling who needs dropping off first. These are solvable with a schedule change, a neighbor, or a school resource, and they are the most common cause.

Health and household: illness, medical appointments scheduled during school hours, a caregiver's own health, a family obligation like a visit or a court date. Some of these can be moved; the ones that cannot should be communicated in advance rather than explained after.

Avoidance: the student does not want to be there. Bullying, a class they are failing, a teacher conflict, anxiety, shame about the family's situation. Avoidance looks like frequent stomachaches and headaches on school mornings that resolve by ten a.m. This one does not respond to stricter enforcement — it gets worse.

The response has to match the reason. Treating avoidance as a logistics problem, or logistics as a motivation problem, is why so much effort here produces nothing.

+ BUILD A MORNING THAT SURVIVES A BAD WEEK

Most morning failures happen the night before. Bags packed, clothes chosen, and phones out of the bedroom convert a chaotic thirty minutes into a manageable ten. It is unglamorous and it works.

Set a fixed wake time that holds even on hard weeks, and build in one buffer — a backup ride, a neighbor's number, a bus route you have actually looked up. A single point of failure in a morning routine means one flat tire becomes an absence.

For older students, hand over the pieces they can own: their own alarm, their own bag, their own bus. Attendance improves when a teenager owns the routine rather than being managed through it, particularly in a household where an adult's attention is stretched.

+ TELL THE SCHOOL BEFORE, NOT AFTER

A short heads-up changes how an absence is treated. "_____ has a family obligation Thursday and will be out" sent Tuesday reads completely differently from a note written Friday. Schools have discretion in how absences are coded, and advance notice is where that discretion tends to land in a family's favor.

For recurring obligations — a monthly visit, a standing appointment, a court schedule — tell the counselor once about the pattern rather than reporting each instance. Many schools will work around a known schedule and some will help arrange work in advance.

If your family receives an attendance letter, treat it as an invitation to talk rather than an accusation. These letters are usually automated at a threshold. Responding with the actual reasons and asking what support exists frequently ends the process there.

+ WHEN A STUDENT IS REFUSING TO GO

School refusal is a distress signal, and pushing harder usually produces bigger mornings and worse outcomes. The first move is to find out what specifically is being avoided: a class, a person, a time of day, the bus, the cafeteria.

Partial attendance beats none. Getting a student to the building for two periods, or to a counselor's office rather than first period, keeps the connection alive and is far easier to build from than a full week at home.

Loop in the school counselor early and say the words plainly: he is refusing to come. Schools have handled this before and generally have options — a modified schedule, a check-in adult on arrival, a safe room, a referral. It also stops the absences from being read as parental neglect.

+ TWO ABSENCES A MONTH, TRACED TO ONE CAUSE

A caregiver working an overnight shift found her 9-year-old was missing two or three mornings a month. She assumed the problem was her own schedule and felt guilty about it for most of a semester.

When she actually listed the dates, a pattern appeared: nearly all of them were Mondays, and nearly all followed a weekend visit that ended late Sunday night. It was not her shift at all. It was a five-hour Sunday drive.

She moved the visit to Saturdays where the schedule allowed, told the counselor about the ones that could not move, and asked whether Monday assignments could be posted in advance. The absences dropped to almost none, and the ones that remained were expected rather than unexplained.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Advance notice of an absence

Email the day before, or earlier if you know earlier.

“Hi — _____ will be absent on _____ for a family obligation. He'll be back the following day. Could you let his teachers know and let me know if there's work he should pick up in advance? Thank you.”

Telling the school about a recurring schedule

One email that covers a whole semester of predictable absences.

“Hi Ms. _____, I want to give you a heads-up about a recurring family obligation. _____ will occasionally be out or arrive late on _____ because of it. I'd rather you know the pattern than see scattered absences. Is there anything we should set up so she doesn't fall behind on those days?”

Responding to an attendance letter

Use when you receive an automated attendance notice.

“I received the attendance letter dated _____. I want to give you the context: the absences were caused by _____, not by a lack of interest in school. I'm working on _____ to reduce them. Could we talk about what supports the school has for families in this situation?”

Asking a student what they are avoiding

Say this calmly, not on a school morning.

"I've noticed mornings have been really hard lately, and I'm not asking to get you in trouble. Is there a specific class, or a person, or a part of the day that you're dreading? If we know what it is, we can probably do something about that one thing instead of the whole day."

+ PROTECT ATTENDANCE THIS MONTH

- [ ] Look up the actual year-to-date absence and tardy count.
- [ ] Ask how to correct anything recorded incorrectly.
- [ ] List the last ten absences and sort them: logistics, household, or avoidance.
- [ ] Name one backup ride or route for mornings when the main plan fails.
- [ ] Move the packing and clothes decisions to the night before.
- [ ] Send advance notice for any absence you already know is coming.
- [ ] If a student is refusing school, email the counselor this week.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

Looking at the last month, what actually caused the missed days?

What is my backup plan when the usual ride falls through?

Is there something at school my student is trying to avoid?

+ YOUR NEXT STEP

Pick one weekday morning this week and write out the sequence you will follow with your child.

+ WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Written by My Fairy GodParents — reviewed August 2026.
Official reference: U.S. Department of Education — linked for the official rules and forms, which MFGP does not set.
https://www.ed.gov/
This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.
For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.

You do not have to do this alone.

More free guides, scripts, and checklists:
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint