

Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

School Starts Again with “I’m Not Going”

**How to Respond to Repeated School
Reluctance, Talk with Your Child and the School,
and Know When the Problem Needs Extra Help**



**We've got a problem. But relax.
It can be solved—and we'll even have
something to laugh about.**

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INTRO

It is 7:11 a.m., and the day has already developed opinions. One shoe is missing, breakfast has been downgraded from "meal" to "object on plate," somebody cannot find a water bottle that was definitely on the counter five minutes ago, and you are doing the familiar calculation every parent eventually masters: if everyone moves now, you will be on time; if everyone moves in four minutes, you will be late but socially acceptable; if nobody moves in seven minutes, you may have to start a new life under a different name. Then your child says, "I'm not going." Not "I don't feel like it." Not "Can I stay home today?" Just: "I'm not going." Calmly, sometimes. Tearfully, sometimes. Occasionally with the authority of a union representative announcing that negotiations have collapsed. You ask what is wrong. "Nothing." You ask why they will not go. "I don't know." You ask whether something happened. Shrug. Their stomach hurts now. Their head may also hurt. Their leg is apparently "weird." Medical science is advancing rapidly in the hallway, and you have twenty-three minutes until the first bell.

If this happens once every few months, it may belong in the broad category of "children are also human beings and occasionally consider Monday a personal attack." The picture changes when the reluctance keeps returning. Sunday evening becomes tense. Monday morning brings a stomachache. Tuesday begins with tears. Wednesday requires fifteen minutes of persuasion just to get dressed. By Thursday, everyone has developed a role: the child resists, one parent negotiates, the other parent checks the time and mutters something about responsibility, and the

family pet quietly leaves the room because even the dog has learned the pattern. Repeated school reluctance is exhausting not only because the child may be struggling, but because the parent must make decisions before there is enough information. Is this ordinary avoidance? Anxiety? A friendship problem? Academic pressure? Poor sleep? A specific teacher? A difficult transition? Something medical? Something serious? Or simply a child who has discovered that saying "I can't" creates a surprisingly long meeting before breakfast?

The trouble is that the sentence "I don't want to go to school" can describe very different situations. One child may be dreading a test they did not prepare for. Another may be afraid of being laughed at in the hallway. Another may feel lost in one subject and increasingly convinced that every lesson is another public demonstration of not being good enough. One may be exhausted after weeks of poor sleep. One may be dealing with bullying or another situation that requires adults to act quickly. One may simply dislike school that morning and still be perfectly capable of going. From the outside, all of them can produce the same sentence, the same closed bedroom door, the same refusal to put on a coat. That is why this book does not begin with a trick for getting children through the school gate. Before you can respond well, you need a better question than "How do I make them go?"

Parents often get trapped between two instincts. The first says, "Do not make this bigger than it is. Everyone has to go to school." The second says, "If my child is distressed, I should remove the distress." Both come from reasonable places, and both can become unhelpful when used automatically. Pushing through every protest may hide a

problem that genuinely needs attention. Removing every difficult situation may teach the child that relief arrives mainly through escape. Meanwhile, the parent is expected to identify the correct response at 7:18 while someone is asking where their PE kit is. It would be easier if school reluctance came with a dashboard light: yellow for ordinary resistance, orange for "look more closely," red for "get additional help now." Unfortunately, children do not come with dashboards. Many adults barely come with dashboards.

So the goal is not to become a detective who interprets every sigh, nor a motivational speaker who can deliver a twelve-minute lecture on resilience while buttering toast. The useful skill is learning to observe patterns. When does the reluctance appear? Does it begin the night before or only at the front door? Is one day harder than another? Does the child settle once they arrive, or remain distressed throughout the day? Are there repeated physical complaints, changes in sleep, social withdrawal, increased irritability, falling confidence, or growing absences? What happens when they stay home? What improves things even slightly? These questions do not diagnose anything, and they are not meant to. They simply move you from "this is happening again" toward "this is how it happens," which is a far more practical place to start.

Conversation matters too, but timing matters almost as much as wording. A child who cannot explain what is wrong at 7:20 may not be refusing to communicate. They may genuinely not have the words yet, or they may know that every answer is about to become part of the decision about whether they leave the house. "Tell me what's wrong" sounds different when the parent is standing in a coat holding the car keys. In that moment, even a thoughtful

question can feel like: "Please provide a convincing case in under forty seconds." Useful conversations often happen later, in fragments, while walking, eating, driving, folding laundry, or doing something ordinary enough that nobody feels summoned before a tribunal. Children do not always deliver their inner world in one elegant statement. Adults rarely do either, despite years of practice and access to full vocabulary.

The school also has part of the picture, but not all of it. A teacher may say, "They seem completely fine once they are here," while the parent has just spent forty minutes helping the same child leave the house. Both observations can be true. A child may struggle intensely before arrival and function reasonably well once the day starts. Or the opposite may happen: mornings look normal, but the difficulty appears during lunch, transitions, specific lessons, social situations, or the journey home. The useful question is not "Who is right?" but "What does each person see, and when?" Cooperation works better when home and school compare observations instead of competing for the title of Person Who Knows the Child Best. There is no trophy. Also, if there were, nobody would have time to dust it.

This book is about building that wider picture and turning it into action without turning family life into a permanent emergency meeting. You will learn how to distinguish a bad morning from a growing pattern, reduce avoidable friction, respond to absences without accidentally making return harder, talk about academic and social problems more precisely, involve the school effectively, and create support that helps a child function rather than making support itself the only way they can function. Just as importantly, you will learn when ordinary parenting strategies are no longer

enough and when the situation deserves professional or urgent attention. Repeated school reluctance can sometimes be connected with emotional, social, educational, or health problems that cannot be responsibly sorted out by a book alone.

That last point matters. If a child is showing severe or worsening distress, significant decline in everyday functioning, persistent physical symptoms that need medical evaluation, suspected bullying or violence, prolonged absence, self-harm, talk about not wanting to live, or any immediate safety concern, do not treat the situation as a routine motivation problem. Seek appropriate professional help and involve the relevant adults or services promptly. Humor is useful around the absurd parts of family life. It should never be used to minimize danger or suffering. Knowing when to stop experimenting with household strategies and get additional help is not a failure of parenting. It is part of responsible parenting.

The aim, then, is not a child who wakes every school morning delighted by the educational opportunities ahead and skips toward the bus carrying a color-coded binder. That child may exist somewhere, possibly in marketing material. The more realistic aim is a family that no longer treats every "I'm not going" as either meaningless defiance or immediate catastrophe. Sometimes it will mean, "I really do not feel like going today." Sometimes it will mean, "Something is getting too hard and I do not know how to explain it." The difference is not always obvious at first. But it can become clearer. And once it becomes clearer, the morning stops being a mystery you must solve before the toast pops up and becomes something much more manageable: a problem with clues, choices, limits, and a next step.

Chapter 1 - "I'm Not Going" Is Not a Diagnosis

The first mistake often happens within three seconds of hearing the sentence. Your child says, "I'm not going," and your brain immediately begins translating. They are tired. They are being difficult. They forgot their homework. Somebody upset them. They are trying to get a day off. They are anxious. They stayed up too late. They hate math. They have discovered that if they delay long enough, the school bus eventually leaves without them, which from a purely logistical perspective is annoyingly clever. The problem is that any of those explanations might be right, and none of them is automatically right. "I'm not going" is an outcome, not an explanation. It is the visible part of a process that may have started ten minutes ago, last night, three weeks ago, or quietly enough that nobody noticed. If you treat the sentence as though it already tells you what the problem is, you risk solving the wrong problem with admirable efficiency.

Imagine three children saying exactly the same words. The first complains loudly, drags out breakfast, insists school is pointless, but eventually leaves and is perfectly fine once the day gets moving. The second becomes reluctant only on Thursdays, starts asking questions about Thursday on Wednesday night, and later mentions that Thursday includes a class where they regularly feel lost and expect to be called on. The third begins worrying on Sunday evening, sleeps poorly, reports nausea in the morning, cries before leaving, and struggles even when there is nothing unusual scheduled that day. Same sentence. Very different