



# PDA Teen School Refusal

A guide for parents and schools

---

School refusal in PDA teenagers is common, serious, and almost always under-supported. This guide covers the causes, the approaches that help, and the education options available when mainstream attendance is not possible.

## Why It Escalates in the Teen Years

- Secondary school demands are dramatically higher than primary
- Social complexity and peer pressure intensify
- Accumulated years of masking, coping, and crisis create burnout
- The teenager has more capacity to physically resist than a younger child
- The consequences of not attending feel higher — ATAR, future, judgement

## What Doesn't Work

### Approaches that consistently worsen PDA school refusal

Forcing attendance without addressing the anxiety. Reward systems for attendance. Removing privileges for non-attendance. Involving multiple authority figures. Publicly labelling it as "refusal" in front of the teenager.

## First Steps — For Parents

1. Get a medical certificate from your GP documenting the anxiety-based attendance difficulty
2. Request a school meeting to discuss adjustments — not just attendance targets
3. Engage a psychologist with PDA or anxiety-based school refusal experience
4. Investigate all flexible attendance options before the situation becomes critical

## First Steps — For Schools

### School response that actually helps

- Conduct a functional assessment — what specifically is costing this student so much?
- Develop a modified attendance plan with genuine student input
- Identify a safe person and safe space
- Remove or modify the highest-cost demands
- Explore partial attendance, distance education, or alternative programmes



# PDA Teen School Refusal

A guide for parents and schools

---

## Education Alternatives for PDA Teenagers

- Modified attendance (reduced days, selective classes)
- Distance education (state-based accredited programmes)
- Flexi schools and alternative learning centres
- TAFE — some courses available from 15, and often lower demand
- Online schooling (accredited private providers)
- Home education — registered with state authority

**The education goal** Your teenager's long-term educational pathway matters — but it will not be served by forcing attendance that causes ongoing trauma. A stable, recovering teenager can re-engage with learning. A teenager in chronic crisis cannot.