



PREVENTING YOUTH DISCONNECTION

IF YOUR STUDENT IS STRUGGLING TO STAY CONNECTED, THERE ARE RESOURCES AND YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

For Families and Caregivers in New Jersey

Worrying about your student's future is one of the hardest feelings a caregiver can have. The good news: students who are at risk of leaving school can be supported — especially when a caring adult steps in early. This guide is for you.

Warning Signs to Watch For

You may already sense something is off. Here are common signs a student may be pulling away from school:

- Missing school often — more than 1-2 days per month
- Failing two or more classes
- Saying things like "school isn't for me" or "I don't belong there"
- Withdrawing from friends, activities, or things they used to enjoy
- Working long hours or taking on heavy responsibilities at home
- Involvement with the justice system
- Significant changes in mood, sleep, or behavior

Why Students Disconnect

It's rarely just about attitude. Common root causes include:

- Mental health challenges like anxiety or depression
- Bullying or feeling unsafe at school
- Learning differences that were never fully addressed
- Housing instability, food insecurity, or family stress
- Feeling invisible or unsupported by school staff
- Trauma or difficult experiences outside of school

Your Rights as a New Jersey Parent

You have more power than you may realize:

- NJ schools must serve students through age 20 — your child has not aged out
- You can request a free evaluation for learning disabilities (IEP or 504 Plan)
- You can appeal suspensions and disciplinary actions
- Schools must provide translated materials and interpreters if needed
- You can request a meeting with the principal or superintendent at any time





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What You Can Do **Right Now**

Disconnecting from school is rarely a sudden decision, it is often the result of ongoing challenges. The support of a caring adult can make all the difference in a student's pathway. Below are some ways you can support your student right now:

Talk to your student openly

Start a calm, non-punitive conversation. Ask what's going on, not what's wrong. Listen more than you speak. Let them know you're on their side.



Contact the school

Call or email your child's guidance counselor or the main office. Ask for a meeting. You have the right to ask what supports are available and what the school is doing.



Ask about a support plan

Schools can create individualized plans for struggling students. Ask about credit recovery, attendance intervention, a student support team, or a mentor program.



Reach out to a community organization

Sometimes an outside organization can provide support the school can't — like mental health services, food assistance, or tutoring. NJ 2-1-1 can connect you.

Supports to Ask the School About

Talk to a school counselor, social worker, or trusted adult at your student's school. Every New Jersey public school is required to have Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) — a team of staff who can help connect your student to academic support, mental health services, and community resources.

If your student is struggling to attend school or is at risk of falling behind, you can:

- Request a meeting with your student's school counselor or I&RS team.
- Ask your school about its attendance intervention plan and what types of supports are available.
- Contact the NJDOE Disconnection Prevention and Student Re-engagement (DPSR) Initiative at StayEngagedNJ@doe.nj.gov for guidance on resources in your area.

If there are circumstances outside of school — housing instability, mental health needs, involvement with the juvenile justice system, or other barriers — making it hard for your child to attend, there are agencies and organizations that can help. The NJ DPSR Initiative can help connect families to the right support. [Contact us.](#)

For more information, visit [Disconnection Prevention and Student Re-engagement](#) or email StayEngagedNJ@doe.nj.gov

