"School refusal" (sometimes, referred to as "school phobia") describes a child's refusal to attend school for emotional reasons, often related to anxiety.

For some children, school refusal may evolve gradually out of months of increasing absenteeism. For others, school refusal seems to strike overnight, sometimes in response to a single traumatic or embarrassing event. Even children and teenagers who have previously demonstrated enthusiasm for school can sometimes become "refusers".

While some children angrily display tantrums to avoid going to school, others complain of fears or rely upon vague physical complaints to necessitate a day home with mom or dad. Headaches, stomach aches, and fears of getting sick at school are common complaints amongst school "refusers".

School refusal should not be mistaken for plain insolence or defiance. In fact, mere willfulness is rarely the best explanation for "school refusal". Instead, there are a variety of factors that should be considered when children begin to back away from school or stop attending altogether.

For instance, in the early elementary grades, separation anxiety may be the primary cause of a child's refusal to attend school. In later years, school refusal is more likely to be related to adolescent depression, panic disorder or social anxiety. Test anxiety or other performance worries along with problems dealing with bullying or peer pressures may also be the cause.

Identifying a "refusing" child's specific fears and uncertainties about school is the all-important first step toward effective treatment. Once the cause of a child's school anxiety have been determined, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can be employed to teach coping strategies that will enable him or her to confront and deal with academic and social challenges rather than avoid them.

At The School Refusal Treatment Program at LI Anxiety Care, our goal in treating school refusal is not limited to returning kids to their classrooms; our aim is actually to help children develop new ways of coping so that school avoidance doesn't generalize into even more disruptive avoidance patterns later in life.

At LI Anxiety Care, each child is assessed individually for the causes of his or her avoidance of the classroom. Then, coping skills and strategies are taught to help children deal effectively with anxiety, stress, and peer relationships. Finally, we work with parents and educators to develop behavioral plans that return kids to their normal school routines. If you're concerned about a student who is having difficulty attending school, please, give us a call.