

Conversation Guide: Talking with Students about Attendance, Grades 9-12

Using this Guide

Attendance conversations provide a supportive space to explore student perspectives, identify barriers, and collaboratively develop practical solutions. Schools, districts, or any trusted adult can use the questions below to guide meetings with **students in grades 9-12** about attendance. The facilitator should use open-ended questions, allow time for reflection, and keep the conversation strengths-based and focused on actionable strategies.

Example: *What are your thoughts about how important school is?*

Non-example: *Did you know you are required by law to go to school?*

STUDENT BACKGROUND

- Who is your favorite teacher or staff member, and why do they stand out to you?
- Tell me about which subjects or school activities you enjoy most and what you enjoy about them.
- What skills or talents do you have?
- What are your hobbies?
- How do you typically spend your time when you're not at school?
- What are your goals for _____?
 - *Facilitators can personalize this question by filling in the blank with a topic that is meaningful/appropriate for the student (e.g., "this school year," "your future career," or "after graduation").*

STUDENT SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- How much do your friends or classmates support you at school or motivate you to come to school?
- What do the adults at home do to help you get to school every day?
- Tell me about your thoughts or feelings about your teachers.
- If you could change one thing about your school experience, what would it be? How would this make your experience better?
- What are some words you would use to describe your feelings about your school?
- Which parts of the school day or which classes do you find most challenging, and why?

ATTENDANCE CHALLENGES

- When you think about the days you've missed school, what is usually going on?
- Describe your daily routines (morning, night, etc.).

- What, if anything, makes it hard to get to school in the morning? Why is that?
- Tell me about any responsibilities you have outside of school (i.e., appointments, a job, chores, etc.) that make attending regularly difficult.
- What differences do you notice in how you feel on days you attend school versus days you miss?

SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORTS

- In what ways could teachers or other adults at school support you better?
- How do you learn most effectively (i.e., hands-on activities, reading, listening, etc.)? What do your teachers need to know so they can help with this?
- What strategies or supports have helped you in the past when you needed it? How did they help?
- Who at school do you feel comfortable talking to if you're having a difficult day and why?
- Tell me about anything that makes school or learning especially difficult for you and why.

Building a Strengths-Based Attendance Plan

Close this conversation by working with the student to turn the insights they shared into a practical plan for improving attendance. Keep the approach positive and solution-focused, highlighting the family's strengths and ideas while ensuring the dialogue remains constructive and supportive.

SUGGESTED REFLECTION PROMPTS

- Based on our conversation, what are some steps we can take together to help you get to school?
- What goals or steps can you try right now?
- How should we check in with you to see if our ideas are working?

NOTES: