



Hindlip First School  
Tibberton First School



# Refusal

This guidance has been written by our partners at  
Perryfields Primary PRU.



**Perryfields Primary PRU**

## Refusal

There may be a variety of reasons a child will refuse to start the work given to them. This can be extremely frustrating but it's always important to remember that children who are refusing are reaching out for help in some way.

Your child might be worried about things going on at home, like a big life change, family breakdown, mental illness or bereavement. They may worry about what is happening at home, while they are at school.

Sometimes, when the challenges in a child's life become so difficult for them, they can have a need to control the parts of their life that they can (like doing work in school or not). It is imperative to recognise that the child is struggling with something, whether we can see it or not.

## Strategies

- **Give time**

When a child refuses work at first, sometimes all they need is a little time. It's okay to let them have their head down or keep their arms crossed. Use planned ignoring and wait to see if they come around within 5 minutes or so.

- **Distraction**

Sometimes taking the focus away from the immediate issue for a short period of time can be more effective in the long term. Try talking to the child about something else, then, when you return to the issue at hand, they might be in a better frame of mind to face it and to listen to you.

- **Options**

If it's appropriate, consider offering the child two options that are both acceptable to you. This can ease the situation because the child feels like they are retaining some level of control by being able to make a choice, while you are happy because either of the choices are what you have asked for.

- **Ignore the small behaviours**

If the child crumples up the paper, breaks their pencil, or scribbles all over it, avoid telling them they shouldn't do that or give any further instructions. The child is either agitated or attention-needing. Just give some space.

- **Be reflective**

Consider what you could be doing that might be triggering the child to refuse to work. For example, are you using a harsh tone? Did you embarrass them for something before? Sometimes, there isn't anything obvious but it's always worth considering first.

- **Focus on the relationship**

For many children, relationship is everything. Spend time with the child during lunchtime, talk with them after class and really just get to know them, show them that you care. This isn't a quick process, but it's always important and worth it.

- **Consider learning challenges**

Sometimes children refuse work due to social and emotional challenges, but other times it might be because they think the work is just too hard for them.

- **Talk with a child on their own**

This needs to be seen as supportive and not as a punishment. Talk to the child and ask them how you could help. You might say, "I noticed you haven't finished your work, why is that?" When meeting with a child who is struggling to complete work, the most important thing is to just listen! Try to avoid interjecting your own thoughts about what's happening or giving your point of view. Let the child talk. They may hate where they sit because someone keeps talking to them, or that they haven't been getting any sleep at night due to a crying baby. Be open-minded, listen, and be prepared to problem-solve with the child to help them.

- **Give direction**

Sometimes they might even need direction to help them get started and work through challenges.

- **If that doesn't work, find out what the problem is in an empathetic way:**

"I notice you're still not writing. Is this difficult? Can I help?" Say this quietly, while kneeling down or sitting so you're at eye level with the child. Give them a chance to express frustration or anything that's bothering him or her.

- **Adjustments**

Consider making reasonable adjustments at the start and end of the school day, for example; being met at the school entrance for a meet and greet, so the child feels comfortable; give time to talk about the timetable for the day ahead or any anxieties they may have or letting them leave before other children so they avoid the hustle and bustle.

- **Discuss their feelings**

It may be beneficial if they are given the opportunity to discuss their feelings at some part of the school day.

- **Brain breaks**

Consider extra brain breaks during the course of the school day. Some children may need to be redirected to a different activity, have a quick run outside, or retreat to a quieter area of the school.

- **Consider reducing work**

When a child is refusing to do work, completing just one item over none is a success.

- **Provide accommodations**

Giving reasonable accommodations doesn't necessarily make an assignment easier, it just gives more options for how the child approaches the task. Allow those struggling with reading to listen to audio books. If a child isn't writing, allow them access to a laptop. Give out a calculator to a child who gets tired with maths problems (provided the math skill isn't calculations themselves). Give a word bank, provide multiple choices and let the child use manipulatives, and so on.

## Remember:

- **Don't punish.** If a child is struggling with some social or emotional challenges, a punishment is only going to push them away further. Your punishment will appear as harsh, mean, and uncaring.
- **Don't send the child out of the room.** It does not fix the problem. In fact, it will most likely make it worse in the long-term. The child might feel anger and resentment towards you.
- **Don't get in a power struggle.** No one ever wins in a power struggle! So much energy is wasted and even if the child eventually complies, it will be filled with resentment.
- **Don't just assume the child is lazy.** So many times, it is often actually easier for the child to comply and do their work and refuse. So, it's clear that there is something else in play. Reframe your thinking to remember that the child is struggling and needs your support.
- **Don't act out of frustration or anger.** When you start to feel frustrated due to a child's behaviour, remember this phrase: "He's not giving me a hard time, he's having a hard time." There is no shame in taking a deep breath and walking away from a situation. It is okay to feel frustrated with a situation, just don't act on that frustration.
- **Don't use threats.** You might be tempted to say things like, "If you don't do your work, I'm going to call your parents," or "Finish this or you can't go to PE." Sometimes, these threats can only make a child dig their heels in deeper and you might regret what you've said later on.