

*“When we could no longer function as a family, NCH was there to give us the help we could not find from the school and many doctors. They led our daughter back, step by step, to facing the school day with the tools she needed to succeed. Their caring staff and group parent sessions taught us new ways to handle old issues and gave us the support we needed to put our family back on its feet.”*

Dan and Judy B. parents

*“I don’t know of any other program out there like yours.”*

**Christopher Kearney, Ph.D. author of When Children Refuse School, Professor of Psychology at University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Director, UNLV Child School Refusal and Anxiety Disorder Clinic; Director of Clinical Training UNLV**

**For more information or to set up an appointment call 847.618.4083**

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**Mental Health Network  
Adolescent Services**

## **COPING WITH SCHOOL REFUSAL**



**A SPECIALIZED  
TREATMENT  
PROGRAM FOR  
ADOLESCENTS**



## What is school refusal?

School refusal is a complex issue that may include fear or dread of either going to school or leaving home or both.

Sometimes problems such as temper tantrums, aggression or suicidal acts and/or threats may also be present. Some children have many physical complaints such as stomachaches, headaches, nausea, etc. Others complain of nightmares or are afraid to sleep alone.

Parents and children may feel isolated and believe that they are the only family with this problem. The child often can't explain why he/she won't go to school. There may be a long history of medical work-ups with no conclusive results, failed outpatient therapy, along with growing frustration between the school and the family.

## Where is treatment available?

The School Refusal Program at Northwest Community Hospital is the first and most recognized of its kind in the country to treat this problem at the inpatient and partial hospitalization level of care. It has been featured on the front page of the Chicago Tribune and on national television.

The program is located on the 12-bed Adolescent Mental Health Unit on the campus of NCH. This small unit, with close staff supervision and highly structured day, is a safe environment for children 12-17 years old to explore their issues regarding school attendance.



## What is involved in treatment?

Based on the determination of the intake clinician, the child will start at either the Inpatient or Partial Hospital Program (PHP) level of care. PHP is Monday through Friday from 8AM to 5 PM. Following the PHP level of care each child returns to school for half days and attends the treatment program in the afternoon until they are able to establish daily attendance. The same team will be providing treatment for the child during all levels of care.

Patients in the program receive:

- A full psychiatric evaluation
- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Family therapy

Patients attend our in-hospital school for three hours daily, where they work on their own schoolwork in a quiet, tutorial classroom. Our teachers also work with the child's home school to address any needs for reintegration into the school setting.

A strategy-based approach empowers children and parents to acquire:

- anxiety management skills
- social skills
- techniques to address negative thinking

The overall goal is for the family to manage school reluctance effectively once the hospital treatment has ended.

All patients are required to have outpatient appointments with a psychiatrist and therapist in place prior to final discharge.



## Who provides the treatment?

The treatment team consists of:

- Board certified child & adolescent psychiatrist
- Psychiatric nurses
- Family therapists
- Teachers
- Masters prepared mental health clinicians

Many of our staff have attended training and consultation with Christopher Kearney, author of [When Children Refuse School](#), and a nationally known authority on the subject.

## What is the parents' role?

Our outcome studies over the past five years have shown that parent involvement in their child's treatment program is the best predictor of a successful return to school. Parents attend individual family therapy sessions with their child, as well as Parent Education Group and Multi-Family Group.

Evaluations for treatment recommendations and entry into the program are done by appointment. If the child does not require the intensity of our program, a referral to a local therapist who uses a similar model of care will be provided.

