

[The social cutter is a truant student who only occasionally ditches classes. If this is the category of truancy under which you would fall, be careful. Truancy is a habit which is just as addictive and just as damaging as a cigarette or drug habit. Cutting classes can be fun in the beginning and even a little adventurous. However, the more you cut classes, the more you want to cut in the future. It becomes easier for you, and after a while you cut more freely and (even though you may feel a little guilty) you begin to see nothing wrong with cutting classes. You've got to stop cutting classes early on in your habit, or you're going to be stuck with a habit that will certainly hurt you and may even end your high school career. It would serve you well to consider the harm your truancy can do—not only now while you're still a student but later on in your life when you're twenty, thirty, forty, and older.]

SHOWING UP: YOUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT

by

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How would you like your school to adopt an unlimited cut policy? In other words, you would be allowed to cut class or attend class as you wished without penalty. This policy was put into effect recently by a health teacher at Temple University. His students were complaining long and hard about “Mickey Mouse” attendance regulations and felt that they were mature enough to decide for themselves when they should be in class and when they should not. The teacher then decided to let the students cut class whenever they wanted without penalty. He gave everyone class outlines and study questions covering all the material in the course. Students' grades would be based on tests that were taken, and all the test questions would be taken from the study questions that were distributed. Students who attended classes would be discussing the study questions. Those who did not attend had the option of seeing the teacher during his office hours and discussing the questions. (Only three students came to see the teacher during the entire semester).

At the end of the semester the teacher went over his attendance records and compared them to the students' grades. He found that there was a very strong relationship between class attendance and grades. The more classes a student attended, the higher was his grade. ...The more classes a student cut, the lower was his grade. Upon hearing the results of the teacher's study, one student suggested that usually the good students get the better grades and also attend class more faithfully. In checking students' total grade point averages, he found that whether the student was a good student or a poor student made no difference. If that student cut classes, his class grade turned out to be lower than the students who did attend class.

Other research has also been done to determine the relationship between grades and attendance. Carl Ziegler wrote a book titled *School Attendance as a Factor in School Progress*. His research study looked at the relationship between the attendance of 307 seventh graders and their school grades. Ziegler, too, found a strong, positive relationship between grades and attendance. Whether the student's absences were truant absences or excused absences, the more classes a student missed, the lower were his or her grades.

Another researcher, Richard Rozelle, did a study at Evanston Township High School in Evanston, Illinois. Rozelle simply looked into the school records to get his data and make his comparisons. He compared the grades of the high school students with the records of their attendance. Rozelle, too, found absences to have a direct effect on grades, and he went on to cite eleven other studies conducted over the last fifty years at the elementary school level, the high school level, and the college level that showed a direct relationship between the number of class absences and the quality of a student's grades. Generally, the more classes missed, the lower is one's grade.

Even without looking at research studies, common sense would tell you that absence from school leads to failure. So what else does absence from school and truancy tell us about the student? Linda Christmas, in an article for *The Times Educational Supplement*, states that "truancy by a child is a warning that he may have emotional problems and that he may be developing delinquent tendencies. At least half the children who play truant repeatedly are maladjusted, and one truant in two commits other offenses."

So what is Ms. Christmas saying? She states that truancy is a warning by the student that something is wrong. In homes or in office buildings which are equipped with smoke detectors, a loud alarm blares when there is a trace of smoke indicating a fire. That alarm continues to sound until someone comes to solve the problem by putting out the fire. The same warning system is built into a human being. To alert parents to the fact that something is wrong, babies and small children cry just as loudly as a smoke alarm. When the child turns into a young adult, the crying turns into other kinds of warnings. The teenager who is truant from school is sending out a signal to his parents and to the people at school that something is wrong. A problem exists that must be solved. Many times this warning goes unheeded, or it is heeded too late. The student may already have developed so many problems that it is no longer a simple task to correct them and get the student functioning effectively once again.

Ms. Christmas also states in her article that not only is truancy a warning of emotional problems, but it also is a signal of other behavior problems. She states that for half of all truant students, truancy is not their only vice. Because of some emotional problem or personal problem or character flaw or personality deviation, truant students also become involved in other problems— shoplifting, vandalism, drugs, etc. In a research study

conducted by M. J. Tyerman of 137 truant students, he found conclusively that truancy was associated with other forms of delinquent behavior. In studying his set of truant students over a six-year period, he found that by the end of the study 64 of his 137 students had police records while 24 of his students had been removed from the home and placed in detention homes or reform schools.

Not only can truancy have a very harmful effect on you while you are in school but consider the results of wasted years in school on your later life. Many researchers have studied adults who had been truant in school and analyzed their life's problems. A man named Lummis did a study of 1000 men being inducted into the army. He found that those men who had been truants in high school were the same men who exhibited the worst conduct while in the army. When these men left the army, it was generally found that they frequently had long periods of unemployment.

In a long-term study in St. Louis, Robins and Ratcliff studied the lives of men who had been truant in school. They generally found that truancy in school lead to the following adult problems: failure in school, dropping out of school, leaving home before the age of eighteen, early marriage, low wages, job problems, marital problems, depression and anxiety, drug addiction and/or alcoholism, criminal activity, and violence. If you look back at the list of problems that truant students have as adults, you'll see that there is a logical progression from one problem to another. Because of a lack of attendance in classes, the truant student fails at school, falls far behind in classwork and credits, and eventually gets so frustrated that he drops out. Because of the desire of the truant to be independent and on his own, he leaves home early to live with friends or to get his own place. Many truants feel that their problems will be over once they are free from the hassles of school and parents. They soon find that they are very wrong. The same types of problems they experienced in high school follow them into the job and marriage.

Business and industry demand promptness and regular attendance. The truant usually experiences job problems and often moves from one job to another, either getting fired or getting discouraged with the type of work he has to do. Low wages plague the dropout and truant because he's only able to get the types of jobs that few others will take. Because of the frustration and problems on the job, marital problems soon follow. Of course, when people get married, they want a nice place to live, comfortable furniture, decent clothes, a nice car or two, appliances and luxuries, electronics, TVs, etc. These things take money, and that's one thing of which the truant and dropout have very little. Friction arises between husband and wife as to what things to buy now and what things to wait for; how, to pay the bills for food, utilities, taxes, house payments or rent, gas, car loans, etc.; and how to get a better and higher paying job. Problem builds upon problem and the truant tends to hide or smother the problems in drugs and alcohol. One won't notice the problems if one can't feel the pain. Many people at this point turn to criminality in order to get more money and better lifestyles.

Theft, embezzlement, con games, gambling, and other criminal acts creep into the truant's life, and it's all downhill from there.

Although the study by Robins and Ratcliff dealt with men who had been truant, girls who have been truant do not fare much better. Even if a girl were to plan on early marriage and to plan on being supported for most of her life, no one can predict the loss of a husband through death, divorce, or incarceration. More and more women today are supporting themselves or, at least, contributing substantially to the family income. Any girl, truant or not, must be prepared at all times in her life to support herself and also, possibly, several children.

One must realize that the types of problems that begin with truancy only get worse and cause still more problems of an even more serious nature later in life. Most people expect to be happy in their lives and to live comfortably. If that is a goal of your's, make every effort possible to solve your problems now. The longer you go in life without solving emotional or personal problems or flaws of character or personality, the more serious your problems become, the harder are your problems to solve, and the unhappier you get. Considering that your life and your state of unhappiness will not improve until you change something about your attitudes and/or habits, it would be wise to work as hard as possible now to solve your problems rather than to wait until you one day discover they can no longer be solved.