**7.2 Chronic Absenteeism**

**Importance of regular attendance**

**Consistent school attendance is critical for many reasons.**

* When students miss school they miss instructions.
* Catching up of missed class lesson is very difficult especially in higher classes.
* Daily attendance is similar to building a wall. Students who attend school every day, each of the lessons is like adding a block to the wall.
* But, when a student is chronically absent, he misses block of learning causing gaps or holes in the wall.
* It can have a negative impact on his academic achievement in his future studies.

**The problem**

Missing 10% or more of school days in a year, due to any reason--excused or un-excused, i.e. absence of approximately 18 or more days in a year is defined as chronic absenteeism. Following are the usual repercussions;

* Third graders may fail to master reading practice.
* Sixth graders may fail to clear subject/s.
* Ninth graders may drop-out of school.
* Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent. Parents’ lack of resources may not arrange coaching/tuition facility in order to make up the lost learning in the school.
* Often absence is due to health issues, lack of transport facility, or a safe route to the school that make it difficult to attend the school every day.
* In many cases chronic absence goes unnoticed because **schools use to count the attendance of students rather than their absence.**
* While chronic absence creates no academic challenges during lower level of their classes, but at higher level, where they usually fail to understand the subject matter.
* It ultimately affects the comprehension level of the student who then fails to score higher grades.

**Causes of chronic absenteeism**

**Bad grades**

* Student sometimes may fail to understand the classroom lessons that lead to a conception of skipping the classes, an easy solution.
* To counter this imaginary idea, parents can help their kid by arranging tutoring,
* There are a large number of ways to inspire confidence in students, and help them feel comfortable in going to the school regularly and attending the classes without any fear or fright.

**Bullying and harassment**

* Acts of bullying lead to a compelling situation where student feels unsafe physically and emotionally.
* It is important for parents as well as the teachers to recognize the signs of bullying, as the student may not divulge the sufferings he may have suffered in the school.
* There are plenty of resources even some apps that offer tips on how to have these kinds of conversations.

**Illness**

* Good health is essential for a child’s wellbeing, so encourage good diet and exercise. Whenever student makes a complaint of un-well condition, parents are liable to gauge its reliability, as calling in sick is probably the first excuse that comes in the minds of children.

**Caring for another family member**

* Sometimes younger siblings, grand-parents or any other ailing family member need special healthcare and attention. Elder kids are usually required to stay at home for taking care of them.
* It’s a tough choice to make. The longer stay at home may lead to a difficult situation in classroom studies.
* Loss of interest in studies, may lead to chronic absenteeism.
* An alternate arrangement is thus needed to avoid such a situation.

**Mental or emotional health issues**

* Students who are suffering from mental or emotional issues have every right to study in school.
* Although, missing school due to mental and emotional reasons is considered to be valid.
* Parents should work with schools so that students can move forward.
* Extended absence from the school can aggravate both academic and emotional problems.
* Families should understand the range of a child’s emotions and behaviors that might not involve or necessitate missing the school.
* They should understand how to identify and help children through more serious mental health issues and situations when they do arise.

**Difficulties with housing or food**

* When a family is worried about food for their kids or have residential problem, school can be a secondary consideration.
* Educators and other concerned people of the community should make a concerted effort to guide such families in the right direction to alleviate these burdens, so that the measures can help the student in attending the school.

**Addressing the chronic absence**

* Parents, schools and communities must work together to ensure that the students understand the importance of making every school day count.
* The earlier those absences are identified and addressed, the more successful students will become.
* Schools, in attempt to tackle the problem and enhance the over-all standard of education may draw a well defined policy that “every student gets success”, and no student follows the casual attitude towards the regular presence in the school.
* When students improve their attendance rate, they improve their academic prospects, and chances for further studies.
* Collect right data in order to address chronic absenteeism. It provides the pattern of absenteeism of the student.
* Early education is vital to a child’s success.
* Pre-school is the ideal time to introduce children and families to the importance of consistent on-time attendance habits.
* Communicate attendance expectations to students and their parents through student’s diary, school website, and in face to face meetings.
* Parents must be well aware of the importance of regular and on time presence of their kids in the school.
* Schools may develop a regular monitoring system preferably through an attendance team, using the available internet facility. A mobile app or a web platform is needed to register all the data of attendance and participation of students in proposed activities.
* The attendance team should monitor daily attendance, and communicate with parents and students about the issues.
* Parents should be notified of an absence as early in the day as possible. This can be done either by a team member or by an automatic operated system.
* However, with a personal phone call, the team member has the added benefit of making notes in detail about the identity of the contacted person along with the reason of student’s absence.
* Early intervention may prevent small problem turning into big. The student who is absent for two days or more without information, his name should be referred to the attendance team for an appropriate and immediate action.
* Prevailing atmosphere of the school deserves a culture that motivates students to attend the school regularly rather than preferring to remain absent.
* Sports, co-curricular activities and cultural events determine the motivation level of students. Academic calendar and the weekly timetable should be designed in a way that will attract students’ participation.
* Create goal based incentives that motivate attendance and help positive student behavior.
* Communicate the school’s progress towards attendance goals to students, parents and school staff. Celebrate the success to keep the momentum going.
* By being proactive, schools can identify student needs and address them early to prevent chronic absenteeism.
* When children improve their attendance, they have more time for learning and they improve their chances for graduation and success in college and careers.

***Encouraging students to attend the school every day sends a message to them, that school is important and should be taken seriously.***