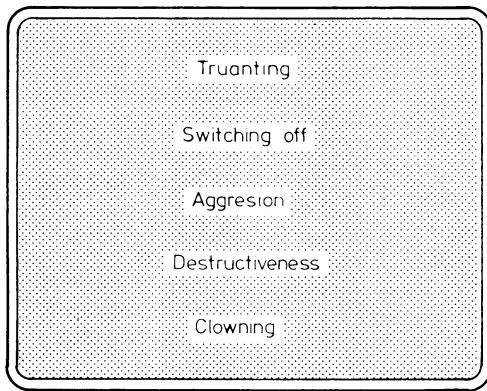


# ABC of 1 to 7

MOYA TYSON  
H B VALMAN

## SCHOOL FAILURE



Children have to go to school whether they like it or not. Parents must by law send their children to school between the ages of 5 and 16, and local education authorities have a duty to provide appropriate schools and teachers. Many children do not find school unpleasant, but for some it is a miserable experience. A few cannot bear to leave home while others just dislike school or are unhappy there. Although teachers try to treat children as individuals and provide appropriate learning experiences at a pace suited to their needs, the sheer size of the task means that much teaching is carried out in groups and individual help is limited. The child who fails to learn with his group may get extra help but unless he can make up ground he may find himself habitually failing. Few people enjoy failing all the time and a child who has no option but to attend school may react to failure in several ways. He may remove himself from the situation by playing truant or becoming withdrawn and "switching off"; conversely, he may protest by drawing attention to himself through aggressive or destructive behaviour or by clowning.

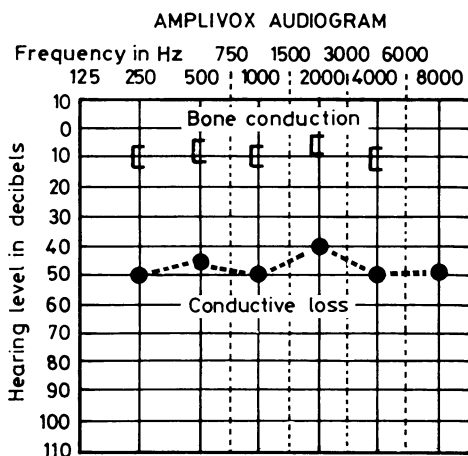
There are many reasons why children fail at school, including poor teaching, but some of the commonest may be explored by the family doctor who is approached by anxious parents.

### Absence from school

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F
Ann	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chris	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
David	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Emma	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Frank	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
George	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Heather	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Julia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Karen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kevin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Laura	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nancy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paul	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rebecca	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Simon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Susan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tom	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Victoria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
William	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Xavier	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yvonne	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zoe	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Teachers try to help children to acquire the basic skills in a logical, progressive sequence. A child who is often absent from school may have great difficulty in filling in the gaps. Continual short absences may prove more damaging educationally than a few prolonged absences because teachers may not realise that the child is missing a lot of schooling. If they do recognise the loss they can try to cover lost ground. It is important to try to discover how much school a child is missing and why. The child may genuinely be often unwell but he may also complain of feeling unwell because of anxiety.

### Physical and sensory difficulties



Although each child is given a medical examination before or on school entry and has his vision and hearing checked, it is still possible to miss, for example, a fluctuating conductive hearing loss. Concerned parents are good observers of their children and it is worth questioning them about any difficulties they have noticed at particular times or in particular circumstances. Some children who attend school regularly may be unwell while they are there and therefore unable to concentrate on what is happening.

## Intellectual difficulties



Teachers do not expect all children to learn at the same pace but some children are much slower than those at the slow end of a fairly wide normal range. Not all schools make special provision for slow learners, but without some extra or separate teaching they may be unable to cope. The school itself may have recognised the problem and asked the parents' consent to refer the child to the school psychological service for advice. The service, run by the local education authority, usually accepts referrals from any source, so general practitioners and parents may make a direct approach if they wish.

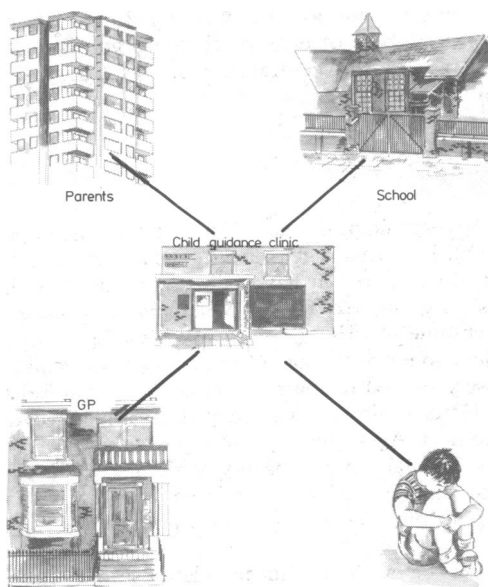
## Developmental delay and specific learning difficulties



It is not easy to decide whether a child's development is at the slower end of normal limits or whether there is a more serious problem. Parents are particularly concerned about slow language development. A referral to a speech therapist should help in making a differential diagnosis between delay and specific problems in language development.

While not unintelligent, some children have great difficulty in mastering the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, despite regular teaching. There is disagreement over the use of the term dyslexia to describe a specific reading disability, because of problems of both definition and causation. Some severely handicapped readers have spatial and sequencing difficulties while others find it hard to perceive and analyse sounds in words. The diagnosis of specific learning difficulties in basic skills is a complex process and help should be sought from an educational psychologist and a skilled remedial teacher.

## Emotional difficulties



A child who is failing in circumstances from which there is no legal escape will usually react in some way, so most children who do badly at school will have accompanying emotional stress. For some children, however, school failure may be the outcome of personal emotional difficulties with family relationships and the child's social environment. The child who is overprotected and the child who is rejected may each fail in school and may produce physical as well as emotional symptoms of stress.

Where severe emotional difficulties are suspected referral to the local child guidance clinic is appropriate. The team, which usually includes a child psychiatrist and an educational psychologist, is well placed to liaise between general practitioners, the parents, the child, and the school and can organise help for the child.

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