



PCS Nurse Newsletter: Stomach Aches and Headaches



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"My Tummy Hurts": When Physical Complaints Aren't Always About Illness

It's not uncommon for teachers and school staff to hear students say things like "My tummy hurts" or "I have a headache." While sometimes these statements do indicate a real physical illness, often they are signs of something else entirely—emotional discomfort, anxiety, or a need for support.

Understanding the Mind-Body Connection: Children may not yet have the emotional vocabulary to express how they're feeling. Instead of saying, "I'm nervous about the test," or "I feel sad because I had a fight with my friend," they might say they have a stomach ache or feel dizzy. These symptoms are real to them, even if they don't have a medical cause. It's their way of saying something isn't right.

Common Triggers:

- **Anxiety or stress**, often related to schoolwork, social interactions, or changes at home.
- **Fear of separation**, especially in younger children who may feel uneasy being away from caregivers.
- **Seeking attention**, which can happen when a child is feeling emotionally disconnected or unnoticed.
- **Avoidance**, such as not wanting to participate in a difficult task or uncomfortable situation.

What Parents Can Do:



- **Stay calm and empathetic.** Let your child know you believe their feelings are real, even if there's no fever or visible illness.
- **Gently ask questions.** Try open-ended questions like, "Did anything happen today that upset you?" or "Is there something you're nervous about?"
- **Look for patterns.** Do the complaints happen at the same time every day or week? Is it before a test, after recess, or on Monday mornings?
- **Teach emotional vocabulary.** Help your child learn to label their feelings—frustrated, nervous, excited, overwhelmed—which can reduce the need to express discomfort through physical symptoms.
- **Encourage problem-solving.** Work with your child to find solutions or coping strategies for the underlying cause, whether it's talking to a teacher, practicing mindfulness, or preparing more for a challenging subject.

What We Do at School: At school, our approach is to listen carefully, assess the situation, and provide a supportive space. We work with our school counselor, staff, and families to ensure students feel safe and heard. Sometimes, just a quiet moment in the nurse's office or a short check-in with a trusted adult can make all the difference.