What to say when your child has a tummy ache every school morning

"Every Monday my nine-year-old says his tummy hurts and he can't go to school, and by Saturday he's fine. What do I say at the door?"

TAKE 1 · THE INSTINCT

"There's nothing to be scared of. Get in the car."

TAKE 2 · TRY THIS INSTEAD

"I notice you're feeling uneasy; I'm here to listen if you want to share. And I know you can do this."

Tummy pain? Check with your pediatrician first. This page is about the pattern after that check: the tummy hurts on Mondays and is fine by the weekend.

At 7:40 on a Monday, a loving parent reaches for one of two things. Reassurance and a push: "there's nothing to be scared of, get in the car." Or protection: if it upsets him this much, he should stay home. Each misses half.

What is known, and at what age

The American Academy of Pediatrics' guidance for parents of school-age children is to be sympathetic and understanding about why they are upset, to acknowledge that you understand their concerns, and still to insist on school. It notes that the longer a child stays home, the harder the return becomes. The NHS advises listening carefully and not dismissing a child's worries, and advises against forcing a child into a stressful situation without first talking about what is worrying them; it says that could make the problem worse.

This is guidance from the AAP and the NHS for school-age children, not a trial of one sentence, and no study we know of has tested these exact words.

What the words do

Take 1 drops the first half: the worry is waved away. Take 2 says both. "I notice you're feeling uneasy; I'm here to listen" names the feeling without arguing with the tummy. "And I know you can do this" keeps school happening, warmly. Nothing physical, no threats, no deals.

Tonight, ask what makes Monday hard. Tomorrow, say both halves, then go.

If avoiding school lasts more than a week, the AAP says families may need professional help: talk to your pediatrician or a child mental health professional.

If you live in two homes

If school mornings happen in both homes, a check-up with your child's doctor is one thing both homes can know about, where that is safe and possible. Then, where you can, keep the same expectation in both homes: the worry is listened to, and school still happens. Never ask your child which home makes Monday harder, or use the tummy ache as a message between the adults.

In the UK

The NHS says that if a child's worry is severe, goes on, and gets in the way of everyday life, a visit to a GP is a good place to start. Your child's school can help too. In England and Wales, a child arrangements order may set out who a child lives with and when they spend time with each parent (older orders say "residence" and "contact"). Cafcass in England (Cafcass Cymru in Wales) advises the family court about what is safe for children; for everyday parenting questions, Coram Family Lives (England and Wales, 0808 800 2222) is free and confidential. Nothing on this page is legal advice.

Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics, HealthyChildren.org (2024). School avoidance: Tips for concerned parents.
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3. Coram Family Lives (n.d.). Confidential helpline. Retrieved November 4, 2026.
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emoglow.ai/scripts/monday-tummy-ache/8-12/ · By Bhumika Mishra · Sources checked November 4, 2026
This is general information drawn from published research and pediatric guidance. It is not medical, psychological or legal advice. If you are worried about your child, talk to your doctor.