

# 'Reducing Stigma': Could Mental Health Days Help California Students?

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Students in [California](#) may soon have the option of taking a mental health day.

[Senate bill 849](#), written by the California state senator Anthony Portantino, would allow students time out of school to treat or attend to mental health needs without risk of being considered truant, an infraction that could lead to [penalties for students](#) and fines for parents.

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Dr Mark Reinecke, a clinical director and psychologist [with the Child Mind Institute](#), is broadly supportive of the bill, which he said reduces stigma and encourages young people to seek help, something that could offer long-term benefits.

For about three-quarters of adults who struggle with anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorder, symptoms first appeared in childhood, he said. Seeking treatment earlier could be a way to head off future problems.

Yet, Reinecke cautions against what he said could be “unintended consequences” of the legislation, which could increase absenteeism or even worsen symptoms for students dealing with phobias and anxiety around school.

In 2016, about 8 million students in the US missed three or more weeks of school, absences that put students at risk of lower test scores and higher dropout rates. In California, a student who misses 10% of the school year – about 18 days – is considered chronically absent.