

Extreme Hygiene Issues Responses:

At a previous school I was at, we had the same issue with a female student. Same situation but it absolutely was cat pee. Anyways after long talks, trying to get them shower, provided with clean clothing, and repeated calls to DCS and health department, the health department told us that the family could sue for harassment. Basically, it doesn't fit grounds for neglect or abuse, this is their home life.

I had a high school student with similar issues. MULTIPLE times every year up until graduation, I had candid conversations with him as well as other counselors, several male teachers, the nurse, and the principal. His peers complained constantly about his odor.

We gave him a gift bag of toiletry supplies, offered to allow him to shower at school, to do his laundry, to keep clean clothes at school for him, etc... nothing worked. His mom claimed it was his shoes. I bought some enzyme sports spray from Norwex and told him he needed to use it everyday on his shoes.

Two things. Is he depressed? Have you done a full depression screening on him? Lack of good hygiene is a red flag for abuse or neglect too, but can be related to depression.

Opposite possibility, does he "enjoy" the attention of this? The fear of rejection can manifest in oppositional behavior. For instance, thinking the kids won't like him he creates a "reason" for not liking him which keeps him connected and projects him from the rejection. It also gives him a little control if he feels like he's lacking.

I know it may conflict with confidentiality but I'm wondering if you could somehow pull in some peer mentoring or get permission to take him shopping for new clothes or a new haircut, etc. Sometimes "new" things help boost motivation.

Is it possible that his shoes also smell? Some cats pee in/on shoes. Also, sometimes sweaty feet lead to an ammonia type smell. I have found that antifungal spray clears that odor up right away. It wouldn't likely help actual cat urine though.

Does the family receive any outside services? Our local mental health agencies have Life Skills Clinicians/Specialists that can go in the home and work on things like this...

We had a high school student similar to this and we kept reporting to DCS and eventually after several reports they did get more involved and the student's hygiene has improved, but we still have issues.

He also had a sibling who did not smell quite as bad so I can definitely relate to your situation. It took over a year of teachers and counselors calling DCS, but they did finally become involved.

It seems like you have exhausted most of your options. The few I have are: keep 5 sets of clothes at your school. Have him change into them when he gets to school and out when he leaves? Then laundry is done at school and the unaffected clothes do not go back to the house. Obviously this is just addressing the effects rather than the root of the concern. You could also contact your county Department of Child Services. I would speak with a supervisor or director. Explain your concerns and that their interventions to this point have not been successful. Also, we have had previous issues with this and found that the backpack was a big part of the problem. It really retain smells and cats seem to like to pee on them for some reason.

We have had parent meetings between myself, the special education department, our school leaders, and parents to discuss issues such as this. The goal is to make the family feel accepted, not judged. Does the student recognize the issue? Do parents recognize the issue? Just like addiction, the first step to recovery is admitting there is a problem. If the student or family feels judged, pressured, unaccepted, or are just in denial, there is nothing you can do to help. For my student, the autism diagnosis makes showers extremely difficult. Parents are truly doing all that they can. I praised the parents for all their hard work and together, we came up with a plan that at times is a band aid. I have deodorant here in my office that student has access to at all times, without permission. We remind student about washing hands and making it a classroom activity.

Ugh - this is awful! I know this odor of which you speak! I've had many conversations of this sort with a student as well. Our new policy is that she MUST keep a change of clothes here at school (complete with underwear and socks). If she doesn't, then she must be picked up. Of course this is our last-ditched effort after trying most of the things you've done as well. We have her change the clothes and leave her dirties with us, which we wash and keep for her to wear the next time it gets out of hand. I've even gone so far as to get a pair of shoes that MUST be kept here so that I know they'll stay "clean." We went this route because Mom's answer was, yep, I know, we talked to her about that, our doors don't work, the cat gets in, she's not doing her laundry... We thought that if we inconvenienced the Mom and student enough then hopefully the behavior would change. Good luck!!!

When push comes to shove, we use discipline and call it a dress code violation. Which means we've had to include cleanliness in the dress code. We've taken students home to shower/change on rare occasion - but if the whole box of clothes smells, that won't help. We've also kept fresh clothes at school for a student to change into when they get here and change back before they leave - only if the student cooperates of course.

Yikes! Maybe come from an angle of it being better for the cat to have appropriate bathroom behavior? Tell him that he is teaching his cat poor behavior and not being a good pet parent? Just trying to think outside the box. Maybe another angle would work. The storage container is a good idea too! Maybe you can have him keep a couple of outfits at school to change into? Good luck with this one! I can only imagine! I can't believe that the dad isn't addressing the issue! :(

Had the same situation once. We provided a week's worth of clothing at school, kept it in an office near the nurse's office. Student came when she arrived at school and changed into clean clothes, including socks and shoes. The smelly stuff was stored in a lidded plastic bin during day and she had a pass to come down 10 or 15 minutes before end of day to change back into. At the end of the week, someone in our office would wash the provided clothing and the cycle restarted. We had to watch to make sure she came down at end of day, go get her if she didn't. After a while she started complaining about lack of variety in outfits so we told her if there was something she wanted to wear from home she could bring if a couple days in advance and we would launder it for her. There was also a problem with her school papers and books, so we sometimes had to deal with that. Papers that had been peed on by cat were copied to provide one that could be turned in. Hair accessories that were made of material also had to be removed before going to class because they smelled. This family had about 6 cats and no litter box...just an area in one corner where they were supposed to go. One (staff?) person anonymously called the health department and school was told to back off or we would be considered to be harassing the family. Good luck..

I have a similar student. Both myself and the school nurse have talked to the student MANY times both last year and this year about hygiene (including how to's). I have talked to mom on the phone and even called in mom for a one on one. I have also called DCS. What we have finally done that works (usually only for a few weeks, though) is to turn to discipline. Because of the constant smell it can be seen as a disruption to the educational environment of another student. We have flat out told this student that if they get turned in for smell again that they will be sent home as OSS for the day and the parent would need to come pick them up. This is NOT an ideal response, but like you we have literally tried everything else.

- maybe a positive behavior reward using a forced choice reinforcement menu. Maybe he'd like to earn something!

If he showered he can earn x number of points. If he used deodorant, x number of points...etc. If he washed his clothing..etc

- (maybe teach him how to do laundry and make sure they have access to *warm water*, detergents, etc. to make sure he can be successful.)
- Have you explored how he showers? Would he rather take a bath? I knew a boy one time who didn't like the water in his face, so he refused to shower. He never considered that he could turn around and have the water at his back.
- Does he hate water or have a fear of water? Ear plugs needed maybe? Perhaps a dry towel nearby he can grab and wipe his face if
- Teach how to clean with a washcloth in the sink if needed.
- Go through and make a list of all toiletries/hygiene habits you have at home. See how his compares? Make a list together to invite him in the process. He can go through his morning/evening routine with you.
- Make a visual schedule of things to do each night and morning.

Just some off the cuff ideas...

Have you had the school nurse talk to him.

Have you considered requiring the parent to take him to the doctor to determine if there is a health related issue.

I would also consider repeated reports to DCS, or calling the health department to check out the house.

Call animal control(?) to check on the condition of the cat?

Have the parent come pick him up and take him home to shower and change before he can return to school.

It's apparent that you've tried many things to help this student. I'm just spinning off of the ideas that you already mentioned. You could keep some clean clothes at school for him and have him change into them once he gets to school. Maybe you could set up some kind of incentive or reward system to help him get into this pattern. The clothes he changed out of would then be washed for the clean set for the next day.

We had a similar issue at our school. It ended up being that the child was making himself unappealing due to sexual abuse that was happening.

Obviously he has no interest. I have a 4th grade boy who stops by the clinic every single day on the way into school. I provide "Dude wipes" (deodorizing wipes) and the deodorant of his choice (to give him a sense of control). He has the option of a change of uniform- sometimes does it, sometimes does not. The improvement has been dramatic but the student wanted to do it. We only looked to control what we can (can't help much at home without some parent support). Maybe a motivational chart? If he, comes to the clinic and does a couple of items (deodorant and wipes) then he just a check toward something... a lunch with a friend, homeroom in the gym? Giving him a sense of control can help.