

The ADHD Homework System That Works

Is homework stress exhausting your family? Follow this homework system to put in place a routine that will bring peace to the household and help your child establish life long learning habits.

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ADHD + Executive Function Deficits = Stress

Homework requires ADHD children to copy assignments correctly, bring home the right books, keep track of due dates and hand in finished work -- all difficult for anyone with poor memory, focus, or attention to detail. While it may take a few months to become a habit, creating consistent homework routines at home and school will result in better work skills, a sense of accomplishment - and lots of after-school smiles.

Step 1: Get the Teachers' On Board

For many ADHD kids, bringing home each day's assignments is as tough as the work itself. Teachers should post the day's assignments, read them aloud to reinforce, and make sure that there is time in class for each child to complete a homework journal or assignment sheet each day. Ask the teacher to review or sign the student homework journal before class ends. Be sure to review the homework assignment process with your child's teacher.

Step Two: Don't Leave School Without....

Emphasize the daily routine of checking the assignment sheet before leaving class to make sure all the necessary materials are in the backpack. Help your child establish a list of partner classmates or "study buddies" with whom he can check backpacks before leaving and, later, call or text with questions about the assignments. Some teachers record daily assignments on their website, blog, or voice mail as well.

Step 3: Set Up the Home Routine

Set a specific time (in discussion with your child) that is homework time. To develop the homework habit, it's important to keep that schedule as consistent as possible each day. Studies show that beginning homework within an hour after arrival home from school/after-school activities helps kids succeed. So, if your family schedule permits, give your child a snack, some brief down time if needed, and then get started.

Step 4: Designate a Homework Location

Create a dedicated and consistent homework location, in a quiet spot with good lighting, for homework to be done each day. Choose a location as free as possible from the kinds of visual distractions that cause ADHD minds to wander. Rule out television, screen time, or music with words during homework time. Experiment to determine whether your child concentrates best in silence or with white noise.

Step 5: Be Your Child's Coach

Review the assignments that came home for the day with your child before he starts to work. Separate the tasks into discrete sections and decide upon a time allotment for each section. As your child completes each assignment, review it to be sure all parts are complete. On a note card or the homework journal or assignment sheet, help him check off each separate task as it is completed.

Step 6: Help Her Get Started

Children with ADHD often have a hard time getting started on new tasks. Read the directions together for each segment, highlight key words in the directions, discuss how to tackle the first problem/item. Once your child knows what to do, LEAVE HER to complete homework independently. Let her know you are near by to answer

questions or, for easily distracted children, sit in the room doing another task.

Step 7: Use a Timer

Timers are great tools for daydreamers. For ADHD children 6-12 years old, 5- to 20-minute increments work well. Once the first 10-minute block is up, kids often hit their stride and keep working. Expand the segment time if your child is concentrating well. Vary the time per subject to meet your child's needs.

Step 8: Take Breaks, Refocus

When the timer indicates that 20 minutes have past, allow your child to move, walk-around, jump-rope for 2-3 minutes in between sections of work. Large motor movement enhances alertness. If your child becomes distracted during a segment of work, tap him on the shoulder, comment on well he is doing, and re-alert the brain to the task at hand.

Step 9: Praise Effort

Reinforce task completion with specific verbal praise. Let her know how impressed you are with how hard she has worked. Be as specific as you can. "I can see that it took a lot of time and effort to hold the paper with your left hand and write those sentences so neatly with your right hand."

Step 10: Create a Home for Completed Homework

ADHD kids are famous for misplacing homework between home and school. Create a "school staging center" at home that contains a homework folder for all completed homework. When the assignment is done, it goes straight into the folder, which in turn goes into a designated pocket of his backpack. Place a note on his backpack to remind him in the A.M. to check that all homework is there.

Step 11: Diagnose Problems

When kids can't get homework done, address the underlying cause. Is the amount of homework overwhelming? Don't let your child spend an excessive amount of time on homework. Speak to the teacher. Perhaps a tutor is needed. Is inability to focus a serious constraint? Discuss an after-school medication dose with your child's doctor. Help your child's teacher understand how to help by using this useful printable checklist, created by Bonita Blazer, Ph.D.

Step 12: Have a Plan for Long-Term Assignments

The toughest challenge for many kids with ADHD is the long-range assignment. Go over it with your child. Write the due date on a master calendar, and break the assignment into parts, each with its own deadline. If his assignment is to write a book report on a 200-page book, and it's due in two weeks, he can plan to read 20 pages a night, and use the last four days to write and proofread the report.

Step 13: Make Reading Homework Fun

For children who are given lots of reading assignments, reading aloud together can make homework relaxing instead of a chore. She can read the left-hand page and you can read the right-hand page. Ask questions as you go to check reading comprehension. Questions like, "Why do you think the princess went to the castle?" or, "Do you think Buddy will win the big race?" help develop reading comprehension.

More Homework Help

For more must-have resources on helping your ADHD child address homework issues and develop better study skills, visit the Homework Help Resource Center and check out our "ADHD Homework Survival Guide."

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