

School and Homework

Communicate with Teachers

Talking with teachers and other school staff about your child's ADHD is very important. Teachers spend a large amount of time with your child. They will be able to tell you if your child is having problems. They can tell you what those problems are. It gives you a chance to hear about their concerns. It also is a chance to let them know your concerns. You may be able to come up with ideas of things that both you and the teacher can do to help your child with school and homework. The school may have special services that can help.

If your child is involved sports or scouts, you might talk to other teachers or coaches who work with your child. Making teachers and other school staff such as counselors aware of your child's special needs will help them to better understand your child. Then they can work more effectively with him or her.

We suggest you talk with teachers about:

Medications

Make sure that your child's teachers are aware of any medications your child is taking. Explain to teachers what kinds of side effects or medical problems your child may have. Then they can watch for them and notify you. Tell the school of any changes in medication.

School activity & homework schedules

Be aware of what your child is expected to do at school. When you know what is expected, you are able to develop plans that:

- Reward "good" behaviors in the classroom.
- Help your child to be more successful with homework.
- Encourage your child.
- Provide help if necessary.

Ask your child's teacher for a checklist of activities and homework tasks each week. Be sure that the list is clear about what the teacher wants. Ask the teacher's guess of the amount of time that the homework will take. The due date is also important.

Children with ADHD may have problems with different sets of rules or reward plans. Discuss those you use at home with the teacher. Try to use the same rule and reward plan at home and school. Meet regularly with teachers. Talk about progress and specific classroom or homework behaviors that may be causing problems.

Be sure to tell your child how you feel about his or her classroom and homework activities and conduct. If you see things getting better, make sure to give lots of praise. Also point out areas to work on.

Your child's ability to work & play with others

At school, children with ADHD should be allowed to work on projects with non-ADHD children.

This allows your child to watch other children doing activities the right way. When they see this, they may be more likely to "copy" the children doing the activity the right way.

Problems in getting along with other children are very common for children with ADHD. But they usually should not be kept away from other children. They should not be left out of classroom activities. Children who have a hard time getting along with others, or keeping up with other children often feel bad about themselves. Knowing how your child gets along with others at school can help you talk about problems with your child. Maybe together you can come up with some solutions!

Help ADHD Children Learn Skills Early

Get a schedule of homework tasks and due dates. Then you will be able to help your child plan their work. This is the best way to help them learn how to plan their work. Then they can learn to follow through with homework.

Helping your child learn good study and learning skills needs to start in early grades if possible. You may be able to help your child learn some of the skills he or she will need. These include:

- Reading for longer periods of time.
- Looking up books at the library.
- Working alone.

Some ideas of what you can do to help your child learn study skills:

- Read with your child or tell stories.
- Encourage him or her to use an encyclopedia and dictionary.
- If available, help him or her learn to use the Internet, under your supervision.
- Discuss news stories with your child.
- Go to museums or the library with your child.
- Limit time watching television.
- Provide a quiet space where your child can work.

These activities will help your child learn skills he or she needs for schoolwork. These activities help your child to develop a sense of curiosity. Talking with your child about these activities will help him or her get used to letting you know about school-related projects.

Tips for Managing Homework

Find a good place for your child to work

Children are different in how and where they work best. It's important to find out the best place for your child to work. For children with ADHD, a quiet, calm place to work is important. Some children work best where they can be watched and kept "on track" by an adult. This might be the living room or kitchen table. The area should be quiet and calm. Other children may work better in a space set aside just for them, like their bedroom or a spare room. Here they can control the level of background noise, finding what works best for them. You may try different places and see what works best.

For some children, absolute silence is necessary for good work. Other children may find that a radio playing in the background helps them focus by "tuning out" other things that might steal their attention. Telephones or other loud noises that can easily get in the way of a child's focus should be removed from the child's work area.

Make sure that your child is organized

It is very helpful if the child keeps a special homework notebook that he or she fills in after each class. For a child with ADHD, the key is Organize, Organize, Organize! This makes for less wasted effort. Make sure that your child has everything needed to complete homework in his or her workspace. Set up a box or desktop with all the things your child may need: pens, paper, scissors, glue, tape, and so forth.

Children with ADHD usually have trouble planning ahead. They tend to be very "here and now" in their thinking. There are things you can do to help you and your child keep track of his or her work. You may want to arrange file folders for each subject your child is taking in school. In the folder, he or she can keep a list of tasks that are due later. This helps keep them from being forgotten or lost. Your child can keep work that has been checked or graded by the teacher in this folder. Then he or she can keep track of his or her performance and study for future tests.

Finished homework tasks that are going back to school should be kept in another folder. This can be placed in the child's backpack every evening or placed directly into binders or notebooks. This way, the tasks will not be forgotten when your child leaves for school the next day. Finding a routine that works is the key.

It can help to keep a calendar, where tasks can be written and marked off when done. In your child's workspace, you might keep a separate "in box" for school materials such as "permission" slips. A separate labeled box will help remind your child to give these to you.

Make sure that your child has everything he or she needs, including books, worksheets, study guides, or other things necessary to complete the homework tasks.

Organize homework assignments with your child

Before your child begins homework, go over the homework tasks that need to be done together. You and your child should decide which work needs to be done that evening. Make a list of all the tasks that need to be done. Let your child decide in what order they will do the homework and number these on the list.

Because your child may have a hard time focusing at the start, a simple task may help ease them into work. Hard tasks should usually not be kept until the end, because these may need more focus. Children can get fidgety or tired by the end of their work. It may be best to plan the hard tasks for the middle of the working time.

Keep in mind any longer term homework that your child may need to finish. When you sit down at a regular time to plan, your child will need to be reminded of homework, projects, or tests due later in the week. It will help to reduce stress by looking ahead to these tasks. Also notice any tests or quizzes for which your child may need extra study time. Any other big tasks should be broken down into smaller tasks over the evening, weekend or week. Be sure to plan for these as well. At first you

may need to be close by to make sure that this work gets done. As your child gets used to planning homework, let him or her do it alone a little at a time. It may be helpful to keep a weekly schedule and a daily schedule. This allows you and your child to plan study time around other appointments and activities like after-school sports or scouting activities.

Plan breaks as rewards

Make a guess at how much time it will take to do the work, and then plan several breaks. Breaks can happen at specific times, or they can be taken at the end of a task. Resting or playtime during breaks can be used as part of a reward system. Make sure you have planned enough time for your child to do all homework, including break time.

Starting homework

It may be hard to get your child to begin studying. Going over homework may work to ease your child into homework.

You might try having your child decide when to start doing homework. Reward your child if he or she gets to work within a few minutes of the agreed time.

You might sit with your child for the first few minutes, until he or she has gotten started with the work. For some tasks you will only need to keep track of their progress. Your role will be to refocus their attention on their homework if their mind wanders. While doing this, you can remind them of what needs to get done and give praise for their progress. Also mention any reward they may get when they have done their homework.

If your child cannot keep focused, try switching to a different homework task or take a short break. If your child has too much energy, try to have him or her do something active during the break.

Long-Term Projects

It may be very hard for children with ADHD to keep track of long-term projects, which may be due in weeks or months. In the same way that daily homework tasks can be planned, it may be good to sit down with your child and go over the projects. Read and talk about directions given by the teacher. You may need to help your child to think things through. This will help your child learn to think in new ways. It will also help you make sure your child comes up with ideas that are not too hard for him or her to do.

Going over weekly plans for homework pays off. You and your child can plan ahead. Break down the projects into smaller tasks he or she can do more easily. Talk about each step that will be needed to do the project. Write them down on paper. You may think about setting a schedule with your child. Draw up a "timeline" and be sure to plan time for finishing the tasks on the week's homework plan. Include deadlines for each of the smaller tasks.

This type of planning may take time at first. However, your child will learn new skills about how to plan his or her time. In time he or she will be able to do more of this without you. You can plan to give rewards for finished projects.

Rewards for doing homework

As we talked about in a previous mailing, rewarding your child's positive actions often helps a lot. This can be a good way to let your child know that you see things are getting better. This makes it more likely that your child will keep up the good work. At the start, even small tasks may need to be rewarded such as:

- Writing down homework tasks at school.
- Bringing home all needed materials.
- Getting homework started on time.

As your child is able to finish these tasks, you can give rewards for difficult new skills such as:

- Finishing homework without adults watching.
- Completing homework within a certain time and getting it right.
- Showing new ways of thinking and solving problems.

"Coaching" homework

We talked before about your role as "coach." This might include talking over tasks with your child. This could also include talking about their fears or concerns about how hard the work might be. You can help them with new ways of thinking, and solving problems. Reward good planning and good work.

As a coach, you should go over homework tasks to make sure they are done right. While you may need to do this at the start, the goal should be to have your child do this for him or herself. For older children, you should urge your child to check his or her own work.

When working with your child, you are also acting as a role model. You can show them examples of good study skills by reading a book or doing your own work. We suggest you do not do your child's homework for him or her. This does not usually help them much.

Finally, look for ways to have fun, at least part of the time. Anything you can do to make the work more fun will help your child to stay focused. This will also help your own stress level.

Your doctor or therapist may have suggestions for books that you can read about ADHD. You may also find it helpful to contact the national office of Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) at 1-800-233-4050. You may also want to contact the National Attention Deficit Disorders Association (ADDA) at 1-847-432-ADDA.