

Homework Issues and Behavioral Modification

Compiled by Karen Sampson Hoffman, MA

Realistic Homework Expectations



Margaret Foster, MAEd, learning specialist, consultant, and educator; coauthor of *Boosting Executive Skills in the Classroom: A Practical Guide for Educators* (Wiley, 2013)

How much homework should a fourth grade student have per night? How much homework is recommended for students each day?

To find out if your student is working too hard or spending too much time on homework, you need to know two things. First, what effect is it having on your child? The second is what does the school intend? If your child is spending two to three times as much time every night as the school expects a student to spend on homework, then there is something wrong. Sometimes, that is where we begin to identify a learning issue or a placement issue for that child.

There's usually room to play with homework assignments and time spent on homework. Often that's where teachers will allow for reduced assignments. With homework, working with the teacher is often the way to go.



Do you have any strategies for children who display extreme homework resistance?

Executive functioning uses up a lot of glycogen, and at the end of the day, someone with ADHD can literally be unable to pull together the energy needed to tackle homework. What we think of as homework resistance is really those students limping along at the end of the day. They're tapped out.

Sometimes the task is too big and needs to be simplified. Talk with the teacher; he or she may not know the student is having a problem and will be happy to simplify the assignment.

You've got to get to the bottom of it. Talk with the teacher. Look at some behavioral check lists. Is there some anxiety, some depression going on? You don't need to label the child, but you need to understand what is going on and address that problem first.

Behavior Management And Combined Treatment



William E. Pelham, Jr., PhD, ABPP, director of Florida International University's Center for Children and Families; professor of psychology and psychiatry at FIU; a lead investigator for the Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with ADHD; created the Summer Treatment Program at the New York State University at Buffalo; 2002 CHADD Hall of Fame Award

What are some examples of behavior modification as an approach to ADHD behavior? How can a parent know if she's implementing them the right way?

When you're going to a therapist as a parent, are they teaching you skills that you can take home and implement with the child? The skills teaching part is really important. The National Resource Center on ADHD

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has a paper on Psychosocial Treatment for Children and Adolescents with ADHD that I wrote when I was a professional advisory board member for CHADD. I would suggest taking a look at that for examples.

If a child is doing poorly at school and then gets punished at home for something that is the result of ADHD, it's kind of rough for this child. How does a daily report card generate success for these children?

Work with the teacher to figure out the main goals for the student. What goals does he or she need to reach to show improvement? You make it easy enough that the child is successful eighty percent of the time. As the child improves, the teacher increases the goals. It may take six weeks to get to the level you want but that success is important. You motivate the child by success.

Will psychosocial skills and behavioral treatments stick, even when medication is not employed?

Yes, the treatment will stick. We've been using these approaches for forty years. It works with and without medication. If you use a little bit of medication, you can get away with using a less intensive approach to behavioral modification. One of the big advantages of combining the two approaches is that you can use less of both; a lower dose of medication has a lower risk of side effects and a less intensive approach to behavior modification and classroom interventions.

Does behavior modification work with older children, such as children in middle school?

You can do behavioral interventions at any age. They're probably most effective when you begin at a young age, but it's never too late to start. When a child hits middle school, parents can step in and start work-

ing with the school and the teachers to help the child improve behavior and academics. There are effective things to do for child at every age, all the way through college. 📍

Karen Sampson Hoffman, MA, is the coordinator of the NRC's Ask the Expert webinar series.



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