



“Are You
Done Yet?”



BY ANN DOLIN

IF YOUR CHILD IS EASILY DISTRACTED and struggles to stay focused and finish homework, you are probably a frustrated parent. For some students, homework that should take forty-five minutes ends up consuming two hours regardless of a parent's cajoling and handholding. The good news is there is a better way to help these students.

Recognize the consistently inconsistent pattern

One frustrating aspect of parenting easily distractible children (whether they're hyperactive, inattentive, or a bit of both) is that they are consistently inconsistent. Some days they toil like a well-oiled machine. Other days they are like an old out-of-sync grandfather clock. Children with attention difficulties really want to sustain focus, but no matter how hard they try, they can't always maintain it. Punishing inattentive behavior doesn't work. Through the use of positive reinforcement and a few creative ideas, you can help your distracted child improve focus and get his work done.

Make a mountain a molehill

Depending on the age of your child, he may only be able to focus well for twenty minutes at a time. Often, the time you spend refocusing his efforts after twenty minutes may be better spent giving him a break so he can recharge and begin again. This can be done in two ways—by task or time.

By task—Fold a worksheet in half. Instruct your child to do the top half, show it to you, and then finish the second half. Allow him to choose the problems or questions he wants to do first. When he's done with half of them, go on to the rest.

By length of time—Set the timer for five, ten, or fifteen minutes. Tell your child, "Work as hard as you can for this time. When the timer goes off, you can daydream or play for five minutes." Another option is to set the timer for a length of time for which you absolutely know he'll be successful. When he succeeds, lengthen the span by a minute.

Keep a homework log

Teachers may be unaware that homework is so problematic because they only see the final, corrected product, not the inordinate amount of effort behind it. For at least one week, jot down the date and length of homework. You may also want to document any reasons you see for your child's homework struggles. Meet with the teacher and share the information you've recorded. Ask for suggestions to help your child accomplish homework tasks. Remember, students should be spending about ten minutes per grade level on homework per night.

How to Help Your Easily Distracted Child



Let her fidget

Various studies have shown that distractible students can actually be more attentive when they are given something to hold or touch. A few good options are the Tangle Junior (tangletoys.com), Wikki Stix (wikkistix.com), or even a simple stress ball. By simply manipulating these toys in their hands, students are better able to focus.

Insist on exercise—the miracle drug

Aerobic exercise almost immediately elevates the chemicals in the brain that increase attention and focus. These chemicals act a bit like some of the medications used to treat ADHD. With frequent aerobic exercise, a distractible student can improve his ability to learn, so be sure to encourage your child to get out and exercise regularly.

With a few of these strategies, your child will be on the road to focusing and finishing in no time at all! 🎯

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Can Skype Help with Studying?

When my fourteen-year-old son announced that he was going to Skype (is this word now a verb?) with his friend Kelly in order to study for an upcoming test, I was instantly skeptical. After all, it's unlikely that any real studying can involve social media... right? I was wrong.

That evening, I decided to walk ever so slowly by his room to see if he was really studying or merely chatting with his friend. I was surprised to hear that they were quizzing each other for an upcoming test based on a study guide they were reviewing together. I heard questions like, "Do you think she's going to ask about the causes of the revolution on the test? How did you create your Venn diagram showing cause and effect? This is how I did mine (holding up paper)."

So, in the end, I do think Skype is the way to go for many of our tech-savvy kids. Here are some things to think about:

- Research shows that students remember far more of what they discuss than what they read or hear. Small study groups are ideal, but when that's not possible, consider Skype.
- Be sure your child has guidelines so that the time spent studying doesn't turn into social hour. Kids should establish with their peer how long the study session will last and what they need to accomplish. All worksheets and study guides should be emailed ahead of time.
- Skype can help your child with a sense of accountability. Some students just can't muster enough energy to study alone, but they often can when they have an established study session with a friend.

And your tween or teen will surely be impressed when you encourage Skype as a study tool!

—Ann Dolin, MEd