



Ask the Expert

Homework, Organization, and Time Management
Strategies for Supporting Kids with ADHD

by **Melissa Dvorsky, PhD**



Homework, Organization, and Time Management Strategies for Supporting

ADHD Inattention Symptoms

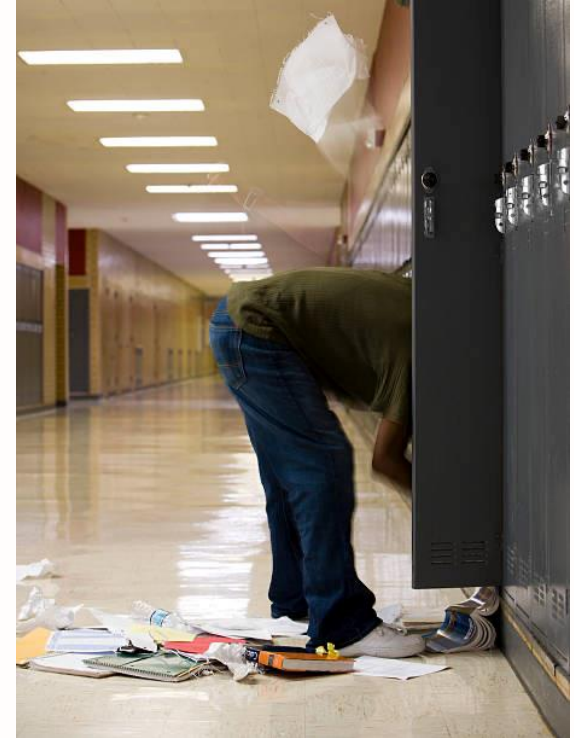
- Inattention to details/makes careless mistakes
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Seems not to listen
- *Fails to finish tasks*
- *Difficulty organizing*
- Avoids tasks requiring sustained attention
- *Loses things*
- Easily distracted
- *Forgetful*

How ADHD Manifests in the School Context

- Forgets to record assignments or records inaccurately (20%)
- Forgets to bring materials home
- Frequently loses or misplaces work
- Disorganized binders and bookbags
- Procrastinate and fail to plan
- Lack of focus and/or
- Disruptive behaviors

Understanding Youth with ADHD

- **Executive Functions:** inhibiting behavior in immediate term to work towards long term goals
- Immediate “rewards” are naturally available for doing the “wrong” thing
 - If I say I have no homework, I get to go outside
 - If I don’t write down homework, I get to talk with my friends
- Long-term “rewards” available in school are often not salient to students with ADHD
 - Turn in homework every day → better grades at end of semester
 - Organize materials now → better chance of finding homework later





Why Organization & Time Management Skills are Important

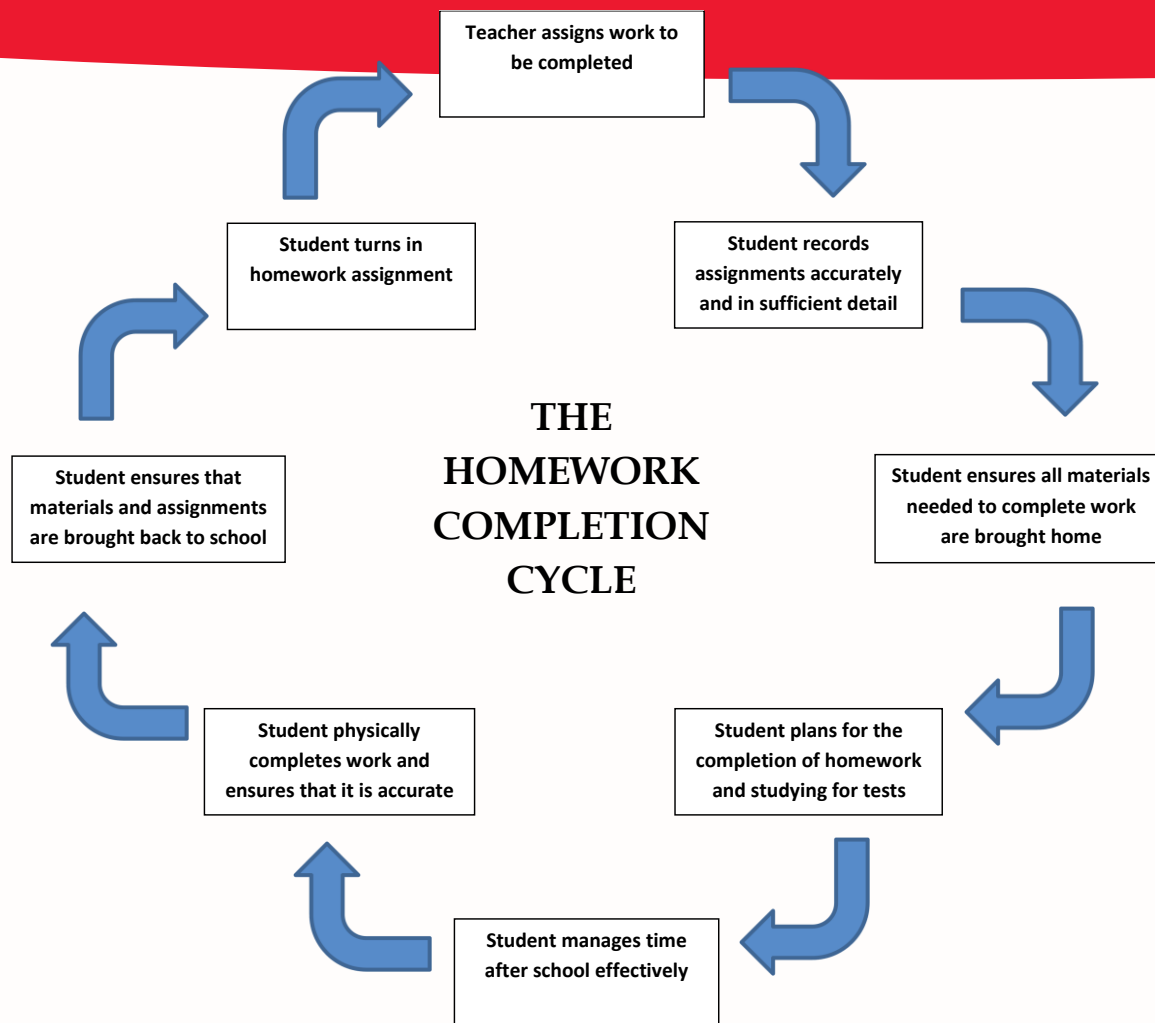


- Homework, organization, and planning skills are important mechanisms through which students learn and engage in school
- Important components of academic performance and occupational success
- We often assume students naturally develop these skills but that is often not the case
- Even when students do use these skills, they are often inefficient or rely heavily on parent support
- Skills remain important and predict success in later education, college, and adulthood
 - E.g., paying and organizing bills, managing time at work

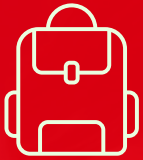
High Risk Developmental Periods



- The transition to middle school
- Significant contextual change
- Move to multiple classrooms/teachers
 - Manage materials and planning for four classes
- Increased cognitive & academic demands
 - E.g., Prepare and plan for long-term projects/tests
- Reduction in parent/teacher support
 - Increased independence/autonomy
- Increased risk for academic failure
- Unique opportunity to teach skills



Strategies for Improving Organization, Time Management, and Homework



Building
Independence
by Teaching
Organization
and Time
Management
Skills



Setting
and
Monitoring
Goals



Using
Rewards
to
Motivate

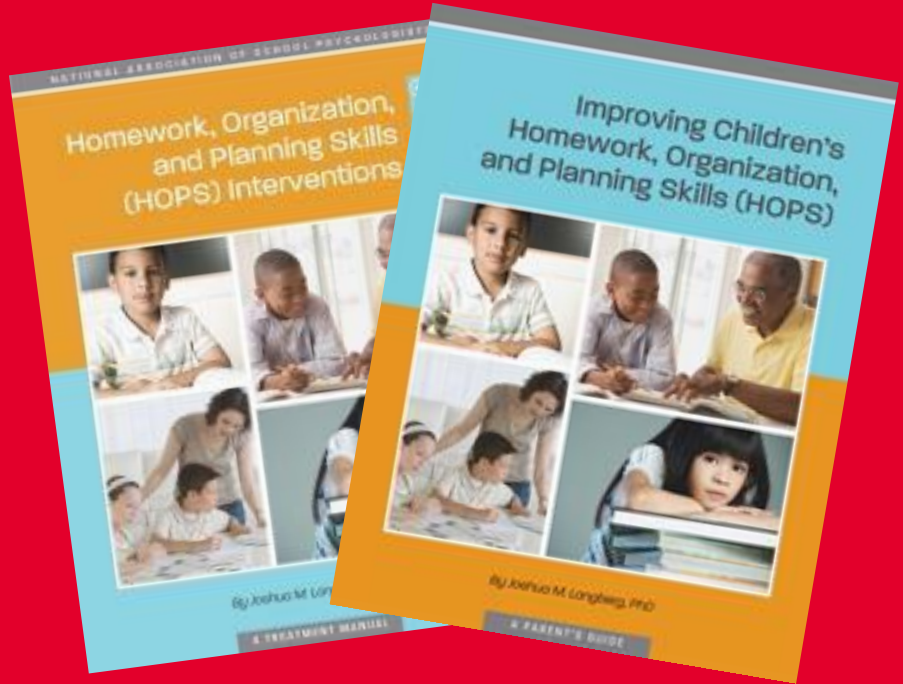


Setting
up a
Plan for
Success



Maintaining
a
Positive
Tone

Homework Organization and Planning Skills (HOPS) Intervention



- Developed and authored by Joshua M. Langberg, Ph.D. (Virginia Commonwealth University)
- With support from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (IES)
- Published by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

Building Independence by Teaching Organization & Time Management Skills

Organization

- The child learns to organize themselves by **clearly defining** organization behaviors
 - Homework folder: “to be completed” and “to be turned in”
- Designate space for doing schoolwork and keeping school materials
- Help the child develop their own system that works for them
- Gradually shape the organization behavior by positively reinforcing any movement in the desired direction
- Parent’s role as coach/cheerleader (not nagging)



Defining Organization:



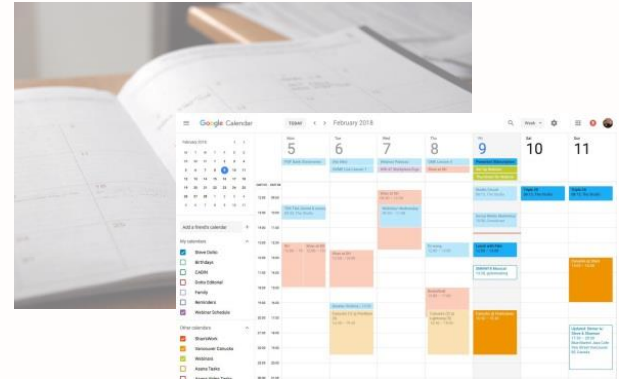
- There are no clothes or trash in the bookbag
- There are no loose papers in the binder
- There are no loose papers in the bookbag
- All writing utensils are in the pencil pouch
- Homework to be completed is on the left side of the homework folder
- Homework to turn in is on the right side of the homework folder
- All graded homework and non-homework papers are filed in the correct subject folder/section of the binder

Building Independence by Teaching Organization & Time Management Skills

Keeping Track of Assigned Tasks: “Homework Recording”

Using a planner/calendar

- What do you want to see in the calendar?
- How often should they update their calendar?
- How much detail is sufficient?



Electronic vs. paper calendars...pick just one!



Building Independence by Teaching Organization & Time Management Skills

Time Management/Planning:

Schedule upcoming tests and projects in advance

Breakdown larger tasks into smaller sub-tasks

Schedule these sub-task activities in the planner

Reward for following the plan!



Building Independence by Teaching Organization & Time Management Skills

Creating an Evening (or Day) Schedule:

- Plan in advance what/when they will do:
 - Task to complete
 - Scheduled activities
 - Fun activities
- Planning how after school time will be used efficiently
- Break tasks into manageable chunks
- Make it as realistic as possible
- Monitor time while doing the task(s) and shape over time



Example Evening Schedule

Time	Activity	Notes
4:30	Snack	
5:00	Dance class	
5:30	Dance class	
6:00	Dinner	
6:30	Dinner	
7:00	Complete science homework	Answer questions at the end of chapter 6.
7:30	Begin science project	Research stages of the butterfly lifecycle and write each stage down in journal
8:00	TV	
8:30	TV	
9:00	Study spelling words	Make flashcards from spelling list on page 76 and review cards for 15 minutes.
9:30	Shower	
10:00	Bed	

Setting and Monitoring Goals

Defining Behavior

- Focus on telling child what to do instead of what not to do
- Specifically **define** what we want to see
 - Avoids confusion and potential disagreement
 - Provides child the opportunity to succeed (rather than to focus on avoiding failure)
 - Provides us many more opportunities to provide immediate/positive feedback to “balance the scale”
 - Allows us to shape behavior gradually towards a goal



Setting and Monitoring Goals

Monitoring Behavior

- Once behavior is defined, establish a plan for monitoring progress and rewarding success - rather than only providing feedback following problems
- Consistency is key!
 - Child knows exactly when behavior is going to be checked
- Feasibility is an important consideration for monitoring
- Monitor behavior as frequent as possible (feasible), especially early in the process
- Physically tracking/documenting progress is important

Sample Points Tracking System

Create a personalized checklist to check target behaviors at set times

TARGET BEHAVIOR GOALS	Points	2/2	2/3	2/4	2/5
At least 85% of homework is recorded accurately and with sufficient detail	8	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
No loose papers are in binder	3	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
Gets started on homework by 5pm	5	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
Turns in schoolwork on time with no more than 1 missing assignment	5	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
Stays on task during homework time with 3 or fewer reminders	4	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N

Setting and Monitoring Goals

Setting Realistic Goals to Ensure Success

- Children and adolescents **must experience success quickly** if they are going to continue to work to improve behavior.
- Ideally, they earn reward (points, praise) the first time they make an effort
- This also builds motivation, buy-in, and trust
- If we ask child to change too many behaviors at once or if we set the bar too high, they will either not make an effort or give up
- This is especially important for adolescents who have already experienced a series of failures because they don't believe that they can achieve goals set by parents/teachers.

Setting & Monitoring SMART Goals



SMART goals enhance engagement and improves outcomes

Using Rewards to Motivate

- Must be **meaningful** to the child
- Provide child with reinforcement for engaging in productive and appropriate behaviors, such as organization and planning
- Reinforcement delivered as close as possible to the point of performance (when the behavior occurs)
 - Point systems work well for this; small rewards delivered frequently add up to larger reward
- *We are competing with naturally available short-term reinforcement for not doing these tasks*
- They can then experience success, benefits of organization and planning, which can lead to internal motivation

Using Rewards to Motivate

- Develop a reward menu
- Providing choices is more reinforcing and allows child/adolescent to “cash in” or save points

Reward Options	Point Value
1) 20 extra minutes of screen time	2
2) Go to bed 20 minutes later	2
3) Eat dinner in front of the TV	3
4) Pick out what's for dinner	4
5) Stream a movie	8
6) Download a book	8
7) Pick the place for family takeout	10
8) Go bowling with Dad	10
9) Receive money to go to the movies with friends	12
10) Have two friends over for a sleepover	15

**Reward options 5-10 are delayed reward options*

Setting up a Plan

Develop a specific plan for engaging in the target behavior(s) and maintaining over time:



- How often (# of times per week/day) will the adolescent do ____ ?
- What days/times will ____ take place?
- Where will ____ take place?
- What activities will be completed during ____?
- How will the adolescent remember to do ____ ?
- (#o of time per week/day) will the adolescent do ____ ?

“Behavioral contract” between youth and parent

Setting a Positive Tone



- Phrase system as an opportunity
- Starting negative = child/teen not listening
- Part of maintaining a positive tone is *letting go*
- With starting small, it is easy to get frustrated and to focus on all the things they are not doing
 - In the end, this will not lead to the desired result
 - Patience is probably hardest part
- Find opportunities for them to experience success!

Setting a Positive Tone

Freedom Through Responsibility

- Children and adolescents often don't like the process of behavior change
- Changing behavior requires close monitoring of the child's behavior
- Children/teens can see this as "nagging" or "treating me like a baby"



"Show us that you can do ___ behavior (be very specific) for ___ amount of time (short period before evaluation) with a reasonable amount of consistency (specifically how often, %) and then earn the freedom of having parent monitor ___ behavior less frequently."

Looking for More? Check Out these Resources:

HOPS For Parents Book: <https://www.nasponline.org/books-and-products/products/books/titles/hops-for-parents>

Infographic on ADHD & organization: https://chadd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Organizing_Space_infographic.pdf

ADHD & Time Management Resources:

<https://chadd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Time-Management-ADHD-Day-Planners.pdf>

<https://chadd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Time-Management-ADHD-To-Do>



Children's National.



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