

5 Potential Solutions to Ease Homework Stress and Enhance Academic Success for Students of all Ages

Do you send your child to his or her room to do homework and hear from them later that there is too much or that they can't do it? Are there so many distractions that it is impossible for your child to stay on task? Is your child constantly forgetting to turn in assignments or waiting until the last minute to complete projects? Are there tears of frustration with completing tasks? Is too much time spent searching for misplaced items?

I know how hectic life can be. As parents, we all are pulled in so many directions we often feel overwhelmed when it comes to homework. My children are now 15, 14, 12 and 9. I've been there. As a speech-language pathologist with 24 years of experience, I have coached quite a few families to help them set up home systems for success. I have also provided direct therapy using conventional as well as state-of-the-art technologies to help individuals with reading, writing, attention, speaking, and learning challenges. I hope that my 5 solutions below will help you help your kids.

1. Set up a homework center

Locate an area that is conducive to doing homework. It is often helpful to discuss this with your child and present a few potential homework locations. Some children do better when closer to an adult who may provide help as needed. Some are better off in a more isolated part of the house. Make sure that there is a clear workspace and that there are a wealth of supplies available that may be needed for assignments. The kitchen table is typically not the ideal place. It is usually the center of family activity with many distractions and items left on the table are cleared at mealtimes. It is helpful if they have their own space that isn't used by others. For some children their room is a great homework location if there aren't a lot of visual and auditory distractions. However, some experts say that a bedroom should not be the place where work is done so that it is easier to relax at night.

As students get older, easy access to a computer with online access becomes increasingly important

2. Get organized in advance

Make a list of items that are needed in the homework center. Paper, a dictionary, scissors, glue, markers, highlighters, pens and pencils, CDs, flash drives, calculators, resource materials, rulers, etc. are often needed.

Use files- both paper and digital. Children can use "action files" for current assignments, projects and classes. The files can be kept in a box or desk drawer. They also need a place to store completed papers and projects. Starting early on paper and computer file management will help your children in the future.

Set up systems to help create success. Kids should put their completed assignments directly into their backpacks so that they aren't forgotten. Typed documents should be saved in the computer in case they are misplaced. Google documents can be used so that they can access files from any computer that is online and share them for others to review.

A special place should be established for kids to put papers you need to review each day.

3. Use calendars, lists and timers

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The use of calendars is critical. A child is never too young to have his or her own calendar. It can be a simple month-at-a-glance to see the big picture of upcoming activities. Stickers can be used for young children. Together you can start by recording school and religious holidays, due dates for projects, birthday and extracurricular activities such as lessons and practices.. Some families find it easier to keep one “family” calendar with everyone’s information in a central location. Sometimes they color code each child’s information.

Older kids may benefit from more complex software programs such as Microsoft Outlook that they can use increasingly as they get older. A web based system such as the Google calendar may be an appropriate solutions if Internet access is available and parents would like the ability to share the calendar. For more advanced needs of older students, the information can be synched with the calendar on a Smartphone or other portable device.

Keep a “to do “list and break down big projects into manageable chunks. Lists can be written on paper or typed into a document, entered as tasks in Microsoft Outlook or be inserted into a web based time management system such as rememberthemilk.com.

If certain days are especially busy, perhaps they can be encouraged to plan ahead and do work in advance.

Timers are a great way to teach time management. Some offer a visual representation of the time left. Everyone needs breaks which can be scheduled into the homework routine. Timers help keep kids focused.

4. Provide your child with appropriate assistance and support

There are a wide variety of supplemental resources that might facilitate learning. Tutors and learning centers are great- but the costs add up fast. Be sure to have your child evaluated for potential attention, learning or language disabilities as needed.

Let your children know when you or someone else is available to help so that they can plan accordingly to take advantage of your time for them.

Talk to your kids after school about their homework and ask if they need extra help. It is often helpful if you ask them to make a list of what they need to do that day and estimate the time each task should take. Planning ahead often makes the homework load appear more manageable.

Take advantage of extra help that the school may provide. Communicate regularly with teachers as needed and be sure to sign up for email correspondence and any web based classroom management tools such as Edline that the school uses.

Try purchasing books which may be used as resources for courses.

There are quite a few affordable software programs (available on CD or online) which provide multi-sensory drill and practice customizable exercises with feedback to enhance learning of targeted tasks. Assistive technology may also help with reading, writing, attention and focus. Text readers can read text out loud which improves speed and processing while reading and can improve accuracy with proofreading. Some software will read aloud as you type which minimizing the need for editing and can help with maintaining focus and thinking of works. Graphic organizers can help organize written narrative. Typing programs can improve the speed and accuracy of typing. Programs are also available to help with word retrieval, studying and researching. A great resource to learn more about what is available is my book titled “technology

for Communication and Cognitive Treatment: The Clinician's Guide." Many families as well as professionals have found it quite helpful. It can be ordered at www.ittsguides.com.

5. Establish a system of positive reinforcement. Post good grades, personal goals, or a system you create to provide rewards for effort or achievement of targeted behaviors. Celebrate success!