

RESPITE TIP



HOMWORK STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Homework is considered to be an important part of school (academic) success. Homework can offer extra learning time, strengthen and improve organizational and study skills, and help parents to be more aware of their child's progress. But just as in the daily schoolwork, your student with special needs may need homework accommodations to help him/her be successful.

Find the right place

Most of us use a work place to finish a task. Often this is a desk and a chair, in a quiet area for concentration. This setting may not be the best for everyone. As parents/guardian to a special needs student, you should consider the particular needs of your child/youth, and what works best for them.

- For a child/youth who needs help staying on task, working at the kitchen table offers a chance for mom and dad to give encouragement and keep the child/youth focused.
- The floor may be a better choice if your child/youth is not comfortable sitting in a chair.
- The child/youth may benefit from a weighted soft toy in their lap to help keep them settled in one spot.
- Choose a location with limited distractions.
- Routines are important to avoid a disruptive situation, so try to use the same setting and time each day.
- If this spot stops working, be ready to shift to another place.

Be flexible and try to find what works for your child/youth to help them stay on task.

Organize your technology

This can range from simple strategies to help with reading or writing (i.e. a piece of paper with a hole cut out so the child sees only one item on a page at a time) to using a computer equipped with specific software or Intelli-keys. If your child/youth needs something to help manage the homework time, make sure it is available. Sometimes a fidget toy or a special pen is all that is needed to help with focus or motivation. If your child/youth needs more incentive and enjoys Xbox or a hand-held gaming device, use the game as a quick reward. Five minutes of gaming time in between assignments might offer a break and motivate your child/youth to move on to the next assignment. An iPod can also be useful. If your child is easily distracted by other sounds or activity and enjoys using an iPod, let him/her use the iPod to filter out other sounds and help stay focused.

Stay involved

Parent involvement can support homework success. Supporting your child while they do their homework does not mean doing the work for them. You are their biggest cheerleader. You can:

- Encourage the work they are doing.
- Offer rewards for reaching goals - maybe they get a special treat for getting a row of math questions done.
- If your child/youth is distractible, you can help them refocus on work.
- If your child is struggling with a question or a reading passage in a book, you can help by 'translating' it to help them understand.

Make adjustments

Being involved with your child's homework also helps you see what your child is doing and how they are managing the work. You can identify if the work is too challenging or too simple for your child/youth, or if it takes too much time for your child to complete successfully. You can be a voice to the teacher in planning homework assignments for your child by offering your observations and recommendations. Ask your teacher if you can discuss adjusting the homework assignments to better meet your child's/youth's individual needs. You might find that your child has many therapies and life skills goals after school - if you feel that homework is not actually adding to your child's learning, consider talking to teachers about monthly homework goals instead of weekly ones.

Get the straight story

Students with special needs often need help with organizational skills. A homework book or agenda book is one way to help remember homework assignments. The assignment can be recorded in the book by the student, the teacher or the teaching assistant so that proper information about the homework comes home. If your teacher uses a website, make sure you and your child/youth check it every day. Email is another way to have homework details go home.

Maybe your child/youth could practice their computer skills by emailing the homework home each day.

Talk with your teacher about the best way to get the information home so the homework is not forgotten.

Ensure delivery

The homework came home and was successfully completed. Now the challenge is getting back to the teacher. Some suggestions:

- Make sure the homework is in the book bag before the child/youth goes to school in the morning.
- Coordinate with the teacher as to how it will be retrieved. Will the teacher be responsible to ask for the homework, or will the child be responsible to give it to the teacher?
- If the child/youth needs some incentive, keep a chart with reinforcement for successful days of homework delivery.

The Tantrums are Driving me Crazy!!

Sometimes the homework experience is very challenging with your child or youth's frustration resulting in temper tantrums and refusal to do the work. Cyndi Frye, an Intervention Specialist in Ohio, shares her story of trying to help her daughter with special needs through the trials of homework. Cyndi was frustrated that, as a trained Intervention Specialist in the school system, she could not get her child to do her homework. There had to be a solution.

She assessed her daughter's behaviour at homework time, determined rewards her daughter really liked and found a way to keep track of her tantrums. Armed with this information, she developed a 'multi-component' intervention for her daughter which was successful. The full article is available here: <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-163264992/homework-headaches-how-i-got-my-special-needs-daughter>.

Some final thoughts:

- Talk to the teacher about explaining the homework so that everyone understands what is to be done. Clear, simple instructions help with understanding.
- If there are any tools needed for the homework (i.e. a calculator), make sure the teacher tells you and/or includes the tool with the homework.

- If doing homework with your child/youth becomes a struggle that you feel is damaging your relationship, consider hiring a local student to do the homework with your child/youth.
- Try to connect with another parent in the class so you can call to confirm homework assignments.

Here are some more resources:

<http://specialchildren.about.com/od/equipment/tp/schooltools.htm>

<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/12/10/a-special-needs-guide-to-homework/>

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/organizing-a-homework-space-for-special-needs-children/2011/07/18/gIQA549I6I_story.html

http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/76_Learning_Disabilities.pdf

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Respite, WE deserve it!



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