



# 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

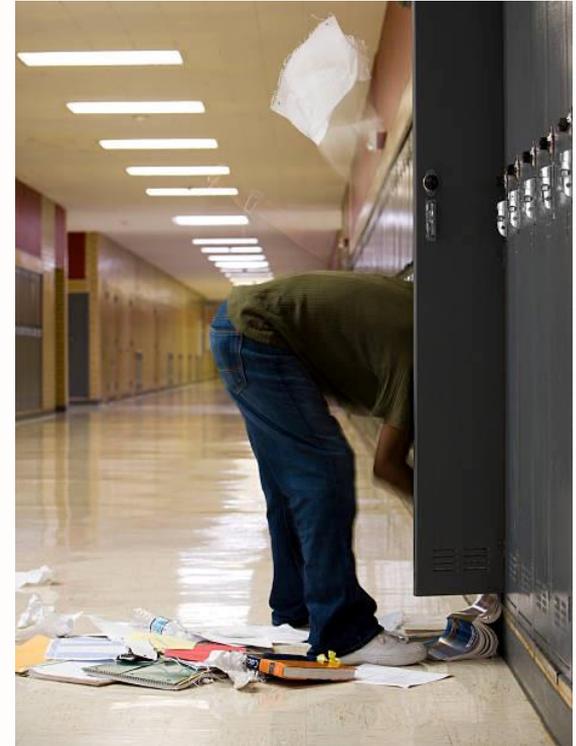
- Inattention to details/makes careless mistakes
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Seems not to listen
- *Fails to finish tasks*
- *Difficulty organizing*
- Avoids tasks requiring sustained attention
- *Loses things*
- Easily distracted
- *Forgetful*

# 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

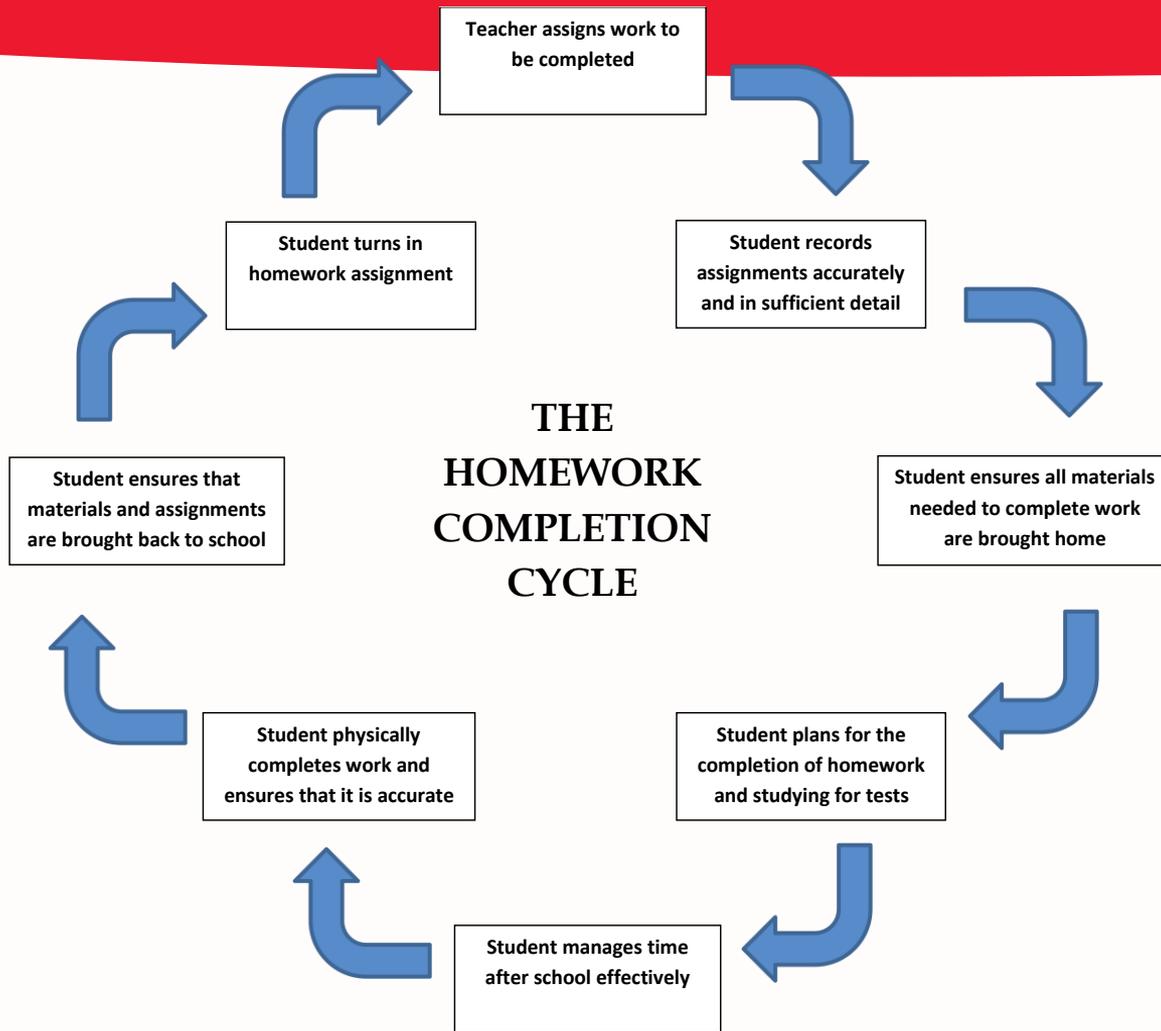


- Homework, organization, and planning skills are important mechanisms through which students learn and engage in school
- Important components of academic performance and occupational success
- We often assume students naturally develop these skills but that is often not the case
- Even when students 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

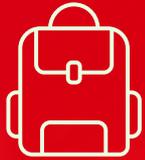
# High Risk Developmental Periods



- 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

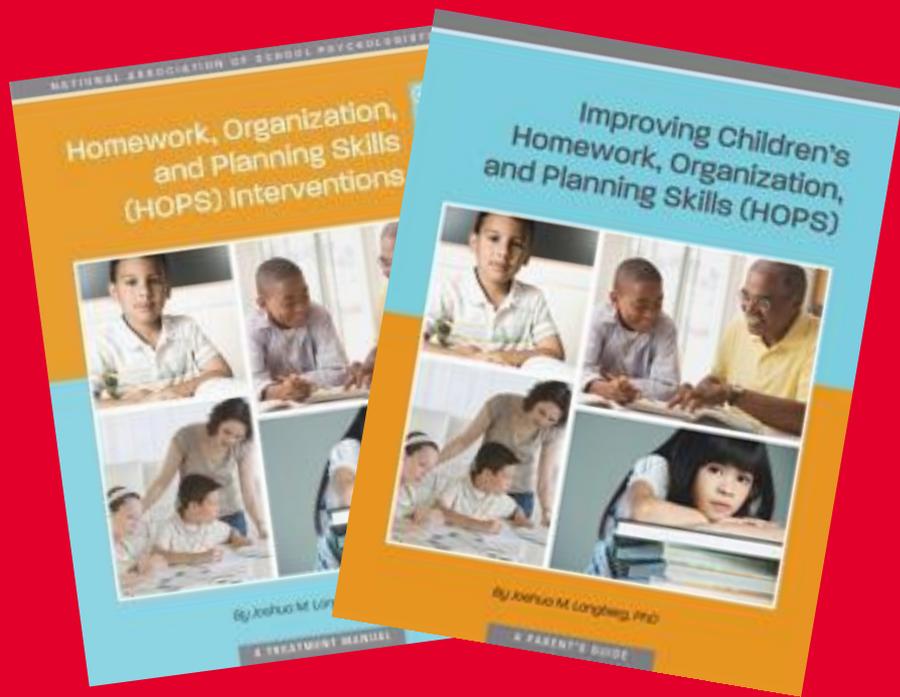


Setting  
up a  
Plan for  
Success



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:



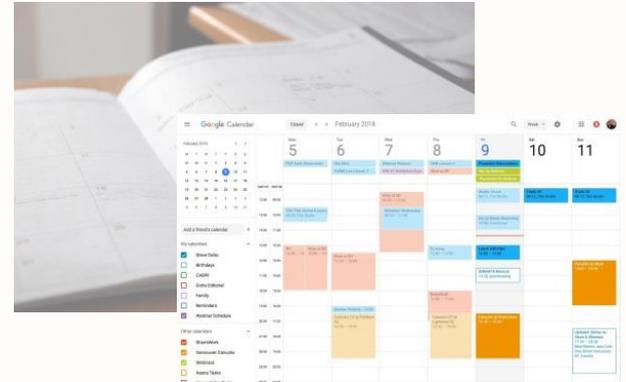
- There are no clothes or trash in the bookbag
- There are no loose papers in the binder
- There are no loose papers in the bookbag
- All writing utensils are in the pencil pouch
- Homework to be completed is on the left side of the homework folder
- Homework to turn in is on the right side of the homework 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

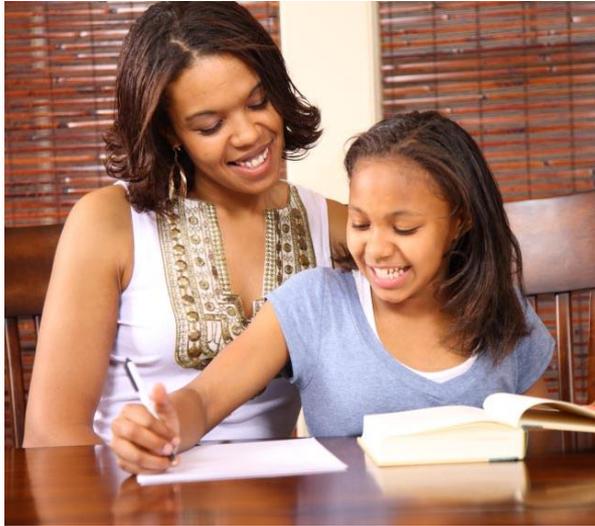
Develop a specific plan for engaging in the target behavior(s) and maintaining over time:



- 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](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.



## Melissa R. Dvorsky, Ph.D.

- Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Psychiatry, & Behavioral Sciences - **George Washington University**
- Director, **ADHD & Learning Differences Program**
- Psychologist, **Children's National Hospital**

### Contact Information:

[mdvorsky@childrensnational.org](mailto:mdvorsky@childrensnational.org)

Phone/Text: 301-683-8715

[www.childrensnational.org](http://www.childrensnational.org)



Submit your questions using the Question Box.  
If you are having difficulties with the Question box,  
please email us at [AskTheExpert@CHADD.org](mailto:AskTheExpert@CHADD.org) to submit your question.



20



# Take the Survey



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