

How To Help Kids With ADHD Be Organized

Many children with ADHD struggle with organization, especially organization of schoolwork. This can be a frustrating experience for both children and parents, and unfortunately it is often the cause of missed homework assignments, losing points/getting lower grades, and a lack of preparation. There are several recommendations that my clients have found useful over the years, and today, I'd like to share two of them with you (with more to follow in future articles).

The recommendation that receives the most positive feedback is the notion of designating ONE folder to keep all assignments. This folder should be unique from the other folders in his/her schoolbag; for example, bright yellow color, sports team or other theme, or decorated with stickers. All work that needs to be handed in (and only work that needs to be handed in) goes in this folder each night after homework is completed and the folder goes into the school bag, and your child is instructed to take the folder out of his/her bag in the beginning of each and every class. To remind your child to do this, you can have his favorite pen or pencil clipped/attached to the folder so when he prepares for the class by taking out his pen, he will be reminded to take out the folder; alternatively, teachers can serve as the cue by reminding your child by saying, "James, don't forget to take out your yellow folder."

At the end of each school day, your child should double check that the folder is empty, meaning that all of the work was handed in. For children with cell phones, some parents find that sending a brief text message toward the end of the day is a useful way of reminding their child to make sure all the work was submitted. Some children have written the letter "F" for folder on their hand each day as a visual reminder (this is not my first choice but it has worked). Generally, after 1 month of using the folder successfully, it becomes habit for your child, so the extra reminders from teachers and the text messages are temporary and time-limited. Like all strategies, it is most important to be consistent and continue to reinforce using the folder throughout the school year.

The second strategy involves creating a homework space that is clean, organized, and liked by your child. Have your child be involved in picking the location and stocking it with the necessary supplies. Regularly doing homework in the same place that is free from distraction can help children get in the rhythm of being productive. It can be a desk, or a section of the kitchen table, or another area that your child likes; most importantly, the space needs to be clear and free of piles, messes, etc. Many children with ADHD find it hard to sit still for the homework period, and these children often benefit from sitting on a bouncy ball rather than a traditional desk chair. Bouncy balls can be purchased online or at a sporting goods store and are those huge rubbery or plastic balls that are used for exercise. Children can sit on them and bounce, bounce, bounce, and this often helps them sustain focus on their work. The work space should be regularly organized and cleaned by you, until your child can do it without prompting on his own. The goal is to create and maintain the space for him until he becomes more organized on his own.

Good luck and I hope these tips are helpful to you and your child: remember that the most important goal is to be consistent with implementing these strategies!

This article was written by Dr. Bonnie Zucker. She is a clinical psychologist in practice in Washington, DC and Rockville, MD and she is the author of "Anxiety-Free Kids: An Interactive Guide for Parents and Children".