

ADHD and Homework Time

by Glenn Hefley

A child with ADHD requires consistency in their life. We see this in every document and guide regarding ADHD children. A regular routine in their lives helps them with concentration and brings down distraction levels. Homework is no exception. There are a number of other tips we can offer to create a consistent study time and atmosphere, but without a consistent environment, they will fall short of the goal (much like spice doesn't make a meal).

Talk with your child and choose a time that will be the study period of their day. Choose an area in your home where your child will study. Limit distractions during this time such as TV or music with lyrics. With some children, absolute silence is a distraction itself. I found this to be true with my son. However, the lyrics in music distract them from what they are doing as they follow and even sing along.

My son and I tried Mozart and other classical music, and some different types of jazz. All these genres did was put him to sleep, which was great for bedtime, but not for study time. I did find that some ambient/techno music, a type of music based on beat and repeating rhythms, worked very well as background sound. A friend of mine found with her daughter that a white noise of ocean sounds and storm (thunder and rain) helped her child. Some ADHD children find silence is better. Be willing to experiment, and when you find an atmosphere that seems to work, stick with it. Some other suggestions to try would be electric fans in the room, which create an ambient white noise. A radio station tuned between channels and turned down low may create a good white noise base as well.

Breaking up the study period works for my son. He has an hour after getting home to relax and refocus, then one hour of study, and then just before bed he does a half-hour review during which we go over what he studied. This helps reinforce what he learned and helps him to feel he has accomplished his work for the day. This helps alleviate one of the suggested causes of sleep problems with ADHD children; when they lay down in the darkness they tend to begin going over their day, and worrying on uncompleted tasks, which they can no longer do anything about. I read this some time ago when he was having trouble falling asleep and found that a half hour spent with him just before bed going over his homework set his mind at ease.

Having a place to study and a good environment to study in is great, but our children need more sometimes. I find that general task assignments, such as 'do your homework', or 'clean your room' overwhelm my son quickly. The skill of breaking tasks down into manageable segments is not something that comes naturally for ADHD children. He needed to learn how to break up the tasks. Help your child learn this skill, so he can begin his work with a clear idea of what to do, and what to do next. Go over the directions with her, read them aloud, do the first problem together, and then observe as she does the next by herself. Then let her continue on her own.

Your support and praise are strong tools for your child; offer them when he puts forth good effort. Be supportive in noncritical ways. Be helpful by pointing out a correction or two if you see the need, but be mindful of not 'doing it for them'. It is not our responsibility to correct the whole assignment to make sure the work is perfect. That is part of learning and a responsibility our children need to learn.

The rhythm of the day can't be stressed enough for ADHD children. Tie tasks together. For example, I purchased for my son a simple mail-slot type shelf. It is about a foot tall with two slots for 'mail' and some hooks at the bottom for hanging keys. It hangs on the wall next to his bedroom door. Completed homework goes in the top slot, his wallet in the bottom slot, and his keys on the hook.

Beside this mail shelf is his calendar. I put his allowance in the bottom slot and notes for him as well. I do this so he has reason to go to the mail slot every day. I put his lunch money in the slot so that he has

reason to go to it every morning. It is a simple thing really, but immensely helpful for him, and for me. I can look over at the mail slot and see right away if he has checked it or if he forgot his homework, or if he's misplaced his wallet, and gently get him back on track. Having a central space in the house to mentally cue him about several things at once helps him to keep focused.

Any incentive I might have for finishing his homework also goes in the slot, reinforcing his need to put the finished work in the top slot while he retrieves his reward. I have found from talking with many other parents that ADHD children are a segment of the population in which bizarre things happen to completed assignments. It is very frustrating for us as parents and our children to know that a project they worked so hard on only has a small chance of reaching the teacher.

Using this mail slot for my son has helped with getting the assignment out of the door in the morning and with him on the way to school. Having it visible from several areas of the house, and near enough to his first entry area in the house helps a great deal as well. We placed it so that it is very close to being the first thing he sees coming in and the last thing he sees going out. The geometry may be a bit challenging in your house but even if you can't get 'optimum placement' such a central place for him will be very helpful.

My next step with getting the homework completely turned in was to talk with the teacher. We arranged that my son would drop off his homework as soon as he got to school, instead of waiting until later in the day. This helped greatly.

If there is no homework for a particular day, keep the study time. Have your child read for the hour or work on puzzles. Have a set of these "other" projects already decided on; don't wait until the day comes to figure something out. The more an ADHD child can know ahead of time what is expected of him, the better. No matter what, study time is study time, just like our work days are our work days. You may go through small arguments with him, every day. That is fine. Let it become part of the ritual, and look at his 'every day complaint' as exactly that, just part of the ritual of going from one area of his day to study time. If nothing else, it will help your tension.

Often, our children become frustrated with having to do these things; they feel singled out. They don't realize that we (parents) do these things as well. We just do them in a way that might be unnoticeable to our children. I plan my day every morning in the shower or while I'm shaving. Well, I used to do that. Now I do it at the kitchen table with a big leather planner. I do this so my son can physically see I need to plan my day and do certain tasks every day. Whenever there is a moment he is near my room at bedtime I make a point of checking to see that my alarm is set. I don't walk around the house, saying things like "I'm setting my alarm now!" In fact, I don't mention these things at all I just make sure he sees me doing them. I have found simple reinforcements in small ways do tremendous work for their size.

Complaints about "boredom" from your ADHD child, particularly about his class or schoolwork, should be noted. More often than not the real word your child is searching for is "overwhelmed", though she may not make that jump. Your child actually may not be "overwhelmed" with the work, the teacher, or even his classmates. Many times the feeling comes from something completely unrelated, which they are unable to work through and continue to process on. Consistency in daily activities helps with this a great deal, and allows your child the ability to refocus on what is in front of him.

I know from experience with my son that his worry level is quite high at times. These "times" can normally be related to just how often his daily routine has been altered. Life happens in our house. There have been family problems, financial problems, medical problems, the whole gambit; but what helps our children the most in these times is the daily routine. They can see these problems happening (ADHD children are quite observant during the most inconvenient times), but study period still happened, and if study period still happened, then he doesn't worry as much. Life is going on, and he knows his place in the schema.

Now let's look at some simple ideas that can help our ADHD children to remain focused during study period.

Many ADHD children think well while moving, or at the very least while standing. Work with this not against it. If you find your child works better standing then by all means set them up a higher desk area to work at. It is probably unrealistic to expect the school to do the same and probably not even a good idea (ADHD children have enough problems with feeling singled out). While at home however your child should be able to work in the most comfortable manner as possible. There have been many studies recently that show highly creative minds, such as graphic artists, also work better standing up. Therefore, this may not be strictly an ADHD phenomenon, and it is important to let our children know this as well.

Textures are so amazing with ADHD children. I find cottons are good clothing for my son, whereas polyesters or other unnatural fibers, and wools, are a constant source of distraction for him. However, textures can be helpful as well. I heard about a teacher who used Velcro strips taped to the underside of the school desks for her ADHD students so they could run their fingers across the rough surface. I tried this with my son's study desk and found it helped him concentrate while he read.

Smell can be a factor in refocusing. Lemon and strong peppermint seems to help. On the same topic I have found that crunching apples is good as well.

My friend's daughter is a "tapper", she taps and drums constantly while reading. Telling her to "sit still" or "stop drumming" is right along the lines of "stop breathing" for all the good it does. My friend solved this by getting a stress ball to work in her hands while she reads.

Study period in our house is one hour. Something that helps my son quite a bit is a fifteen-minute bell. I have a one-hour tape I play, which is silent except for a tone that goes off every fifteen minutes. This helps him several ways; if he has drifted off it brings him back to task, and it helps him with the "time passage" problem typical of ADHD children.

ADHD children are notorious for not being adept at figuring out how long a task will take to accomplish. They look at an assignment such as reading a short book and making a report about it as something that can be blown out in a single night. The trouble is they have some experience that backs this up for them. For instance, my son can read his fantasy novels at an amazing rate. Of course, it is not the same as the novella he is assigned to read, and he is not making reports about them either... two large factors that do not find their way into his own time-estimate equations.

What helps with this is simple experience. Pick some chores or tasks and have your child tell you how long it will take to get them done (one at a time of course), and let them see if they are right. Proper awards and praise are important here. Try to do this a few times a month, so they learn from their experience.

Again, the most important tool your child will learn from is consistency. This above all else is what will help them in all aspects of their homework, and life in general. Work with them and their teachers, stay informed as to what assignments they have and work with their particular needs, but keep consistent with them and their environment, and you will see changes in both their school work and their own well-being.

<http://www.4-adhd.com/article4.html>