

# Homework Help *for* ADHD Children



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From ***ADDitude's*** Experts

**ADDITUDE**  
LIVING WELL WITH **ATTENTION DEFICIT**

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# Homework Help for ADHD Children

Addressing homework problems is critical, since they are major reasons children with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) fail in school. Almost every parent of a student with ADD has been on the front lines of homework battles. Keep in mind that homework doesn't have to be exhaustive to be effective.

The National Education Association and the Parent Teacher Association recommend 10 minutes of homework per subject per day. In other words, a sixth-grader would spend roughly 60 minutes per evening on homework. If teachers seem to be piling it on, have a friendly discussion with them.

The following strategies can further shorten completion time and reduce stress at home.

## Solutions: in the Classroom

- 1. Post assignments on the board.** Write the homework assignment in the same place on the board each day.
- 2. Set aside time each day for students to copy homework assignments in their planners.** If attention or language deficits make copying hard for a student, ask another student to write the assignment and discreetly give it to the child. Posting assignments to the school's website is also helpful.
- 3. Appoint "row captains."** At the beginning of class, these designated "leaders" should collect completed homework. At the end of class, they should check to see that homework assignments have been written down by each student in their row.
- 4. Develop a plan which ensures that completed homework returns to school.** Talk with the parents of those students who consistently forget to bring their homework to school, and help them develop a plan for getting it there. Suggest that they purchase color-coded folders for all completed work. They can check to make sure homework is completed, is put in the appropriate folder, and is packed in the book-bag for the next day.

*"Learn your child's rhythms -- when he needs to relax, when he needs to work. We have a structured homework time, and work for short periods. Always check your child's work — he is more interested in getting it done than getting it right."*

*—Kathy Zimovan, South Carolina*

- 5. Assign the right amount of homework.** Some students with ADD work slowly and become easily frustrated. Assigning only the odd-numbered math problems lets a child demonstrate what he has learned without pushing him too hard. By assigning homework that is neither too difficult nor too time-consuming, teachers increase the likelihood that it will be completed.
- 6. Send parents a list of suggestions for productive homework sessions.** Parents want to help their child but sometimes don't know what to do. Two strategies you might mention: 1) establish a set homework time with input from the student; 2) find a quiet location that has good lighting and a clear work space with access to paper, pencils, and a computer.

### Solutions: at Home

- 7. Make a plan for tracking homework assignments.** Encourage your child to write every assignment in his daily planner. As a backup, see whether assignments are also posted on a school website. Get a phone number for a student in each class who would know the assignments. One high school senior wrote his assignments on 3 x 5 cards, pre-printed with the names of his courses, that he stored in his jeans pocket.
- 8. Establish time for homework.** Some children need a break after classes. Others work best while still in "school mode." If after-school activities make a regular schedule impossible, post a weekly calendar that lists homework start and finish times.
- 9. Ask the teacher about assignment routines.** The math teacher may say, "I assign algebra homework four nights a week, and give a test at the end of each chapter — roughly every two weeks." This tells you that something is amiss if your child says he doesn't have any math homework two nights in a row.
- 10. Schedule a five-minute break for every 20 minutes of work.** Short, frequent breaks help children with ADD recharge.
- 11. Respect your child's "saturation point."** If he's too tired or frustrated to finish his homework, let him stop. Write a note to the teacher explaining that he did as much as he could. If he has problems focusing, writes slowly, or needs extra time to understand concepts, assignments will consistently take longer than they should.
- 12. Talk with the teacher.** If homework sessions are often emotionally exhausting, [localk/adhd/article/744.html](http://localk/adhd/article/744.html)."work with the teacher" to determine whether assignments are too long or are too difficult for your child.

*"I let my son sit on an exercise ball. Being able to move about while doing homework helps kids with ADHD concentrate better. I don't have to nag him to do his homework, and he does not complain about needing to get up and move around."*

*—Diane Spriggs, Virginia*

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**13. Consider medication for homework time.** Talk with your doctor about a short-acting medication, like Ritalin, which lasts three to four hours. Taking the medication between 3 and 5 p.m. shouldn't interfere with sleep. Most medications given earlier in the day have worn off by late afternoon. When medications are working, students stay focused, complete homework quicker, and are more likely to remember the material they studied.

**14. Monitor your child's progress with a daily or weekly report.** Daily and weekly reports from a teacher warn parents when their child is in danger of failing and in need of more supervision at home. The reports help you and your child identify missing homework assignments, so you can find them and get them to the teacher. Younger children need more frequent feedback, so a daily report may be best for them. In some cases, weekly reports may be sufficient for students in high school.

**15. Request an extra textbook to use at home.** Students with ADD often leave their books at school. Having access to a textbook every night is essential. Once a student with ADD falls behind, it is difficult to catch up. Since many schools have only one set of books for each student, you may have to purchase extra copies.

### **Solutions: Lower the Stress Level**

After a long day at school, homework can be tough for children with attention deficit disorder (ADD ADHD) or learning disabilities such as dyslexia—and for their parents, too. Here are strategies for wrapping up assignments:

**16. Start a homework group.**

Invite one or two kids from your child's class to come over and do a little homework together. This can be an effective way to get a look at other children's studying strategies, and the chance to play for a while when homework is done is a strong incentive to do the work more efficiently.

**17. Consider your child's daily rhythms.**

Most children do much better if they do their homework relatively early in the day—maybe not immediately upon coming home from school but certainly before supper. (Everyone deserves a break, and our kids, in particular, may need a chance for some physical activity before they have to sit down again.) Some quirky kids are notoriously early risers, and that can be a terrific time to get homework done.

**18. Have a plan of attack.**

Sit down and strategize the day's homework with your child: How much has to be done? What looks easy? What looks hard?

*“I made my son responsible for his grades. He has to face the consequences of bad grades, and he gets rewards for good ones. If he wants me to help him with homework, he has to ask.”*

*—May Beth Thomas, Michigan*

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### 19. Have a specific place to do the work.

How can you minimize distractions? How available do you, or some other supervising adult, need to be? You may want to set up a dedicated homework location. If your child's room is the place most full of possible distractions, the best spot might be some boring adult setting: a little desk in the living room or some space at the kitchen table.

### 20. Reward accomplishments.

We are big believers in small, tangible rewards for small, tangible accomplishments. Finish your worksheet, and you'll get a cookie. Finish all your homework, and we'll go to the playground for 15 minutes before dinner. With the assignments your child really hates, there's nothing wrong with offering a grape or a gold star for every single successfully completed sentence on the worksheet or math problem on the list.

### 21. Don't overschedule.

If you fill up every afternoon with sports, therapy sessions, and other activities, then homework will have to wait until later, and that may be hard. How about moving some of these activities to the weekend? How about getting your child accustomed to bringing his homework along if you know there's usually a wait in the physical therapist's office? Some schools send home a weekly packet of assignments due on Friday, or the following Monday. This allows for more flexibility in planning, and the final product is more likely to be relatively neat and well thought out.

### 22. Plan for supervision.

Think about homework supervision as you make your child-care arrangements. If you have a babysitter overseeing some of these after-school hours, give her clear instructions for helping with homework, and make sure she understands that, if possible, it needs to be done by dinnertime. If your child spends time in an after-school program, is there some provision for homework? Many of these programs offer a supervised homework room, where kids can work in peace and get help if they need it.

### 23. Organize.

For many ADHD kids, just keeping track of papers is a big task. When an assignment is given at school, your child should know exactly where to put the paper so she'll be sure to bring it home.

After homework is done, she should pack it in whatever special folder or backpack is going back to school the next day. The parent who picks up and drops off the child at school may need to double-check to see that assignments or completed homework has been packed. No matter how carefully you plan, every parent has, at some time or another, driven madly back across town one morning with the forgotten, left-at-home important assignment in hand. You just don't want to have to do it every day.

*“My husband and I have resorted to tag-teaming our child in order to get homework done. LOL.”*

*—An ADDitude Reader*

*“I offer my daughter a piece of carrot or cucumber every 10 minutes or so. She loves the treats, and they motivate her to keep working.”*

*—Eve, New York*

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### **23. Check in with the teacher.**

If the assignments are not always clearly indicated, or if your child has trouble figuring out exactly what is expected, you should either check in with the teacher on a regular basis or establish a connection with another parent who seems relatively clued-in, so that you can, in a pinch, call for advice and instructions. Some teachers are available by e-mail, and some even post homework assignments on a website.

### **24. Bend the rules.**

By far our favorite homework activity for young children is reading—reading together, letting the child read to the parent, and, of course, letting the parent read to the child. If your child's worn out by the evening, take over more of the reading and let her enjoy the pleasant one-on-one contact. We'd like to express the hope that homework reading programs will recognize the pleasures and comforts of reading aloud and will allow children to select books that interest them. If you find yourself with a homework reading program that is taking all the fun out of it, you may need to make some discreet alterations at home—with or without notifying the school.

### **25. Use tools to plan.**

Help older children plan their time—not just for any one evening's work but for the bigger, longer-term assignments. Some quirky children are unable to understand how to break these down into manageable steps, so a chart, a checklist, or a calendar, with separate due dates for each task, can be really helpful.

### **26. Remember the power of praise.**

Try to make homework a period that is associated with a certain amount of praise, with some physical comfort, and even the occasional treat. It won't make your child love worksheets, but it may start to seem like a familiar, relatively pleasant interlude in the day—or at least, like a doable assignment.

*“Shorten homework assignments. I asked my son’s teachers to assign one page of grammar homework instead of two, 20 math problems instead of 40. He feels less overwhelmed.”*

*–Lisa, Florida*

*“Turning off my children’s text messaging.”*

*–Kay, Colorado*

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