



Community Contributor

Ruth E. Harris – Director of Northwest Reading Clinic, Ltd

2600 Stein Blvd, Eau Claire, WI

715.834.2754

www.NorthwestReadingClinicLTD.com

Dispelling the Myths of Helping Your ADD/ADHD Child with Homework

Background Sounds

For some children, quiet is essential in order to concentrate on their homework. However, for many others, the stimulation of background sound may actually help concentration. It can act as "white noise" to mask distractions from their surroundings. Some research has shown that playing classical music while studying helps language processing in the brain's left hemisphere. Music occupies the right hemisphere, allowing the left hemisphere to process language without wandering. There is one catch - the music must be without lyrics (words interrupt processing in the left hemisphere).

The only way to tell if your child studies best with quiet vs. sound is to try it out both ways, experimenting with different types of background sound with a variety of homework assignments. And if their "white sound" is "noise" to you - let them use headphones. Not only can the "sound" option be helpful, it can be an excellent motivational device, especially for teenagers.

Copying Down Information

Copying down information from the board, a PowerPoint presentation, or even the textbook can be a difficult, frustrating, and time-consuming task for many ADD students. As many parents know, copying down the assignment can sometimes take as long, or longer, than actually answering the questions.

When answering questions where they are required to copy the sentences and then fill in the blanks, underline or circle specific parts, it is recommended that they provide the answers directly by writing the missing word or making columns for words that are to be circled or

underlined and merely write in the appropriate words.

What is routine "busywork" to most students can be very overwhelming and unproductive for ADD students, resulting in frustration and avoidance.

Correcting Homework

It is interesting to note that when children get back a spelling test that has been corrected by the teacher, they tend to look at the grade rather than the specific errors; therefore, they don't learn from the mistake. An alternative method seems to be more effective. Have the children correct their own spelling tests!

Here's how it works:

The teacher would check over their spelling tests so that she could note their misspellings and record their grades. She wouldn't put any marks on the misspelled words. Instead, she would just say how many errors there are.

The job of the students would then be to compare their words with the master list to find the specific errors and rewrite the misspelled words correctly. In this way, they focus on the "trouble spots" in their misspelled words.

As a parent, you can do this at home on the practice test when you are helping your child study the spelling list.

Dictionaries aren't for Spelling

A homework myth many of us have grown up with is, "If you don't know how to spell a word, you should look it up in the dictionary." In reality, the purpose of the dictionary is to find word definitions, derivations, and parts of speech. How can you possibly look up a word if you can't spell it?

Yet, we tend to tell children to do this when they ask us how to spell a word. An alternate strategy would be to actually "tell" them how to spell the word so that their train of thought in what they are writing is not interrupted.

You can write down the word each time you spell one for them and put it on a 3X5 card in a recipe box. This becomes your child's functional spelling list, words that he uses when writing. At some later date, you can work on how to spell these words so that your child can "own" them the next time they write them.

By telling your child how to spell the word, you encourage your child to use words that reflect his expressive vocabulary, instead of "watering down" his words into only those he can spell. They can use a \$5 word instead of \$1 word.

Homework after School

It is a myth that your child should do his/her homework as soon as they get home from school. After a day at school, your child needs a break to have a snack, watch TV, or play outside. Remember, when you walk in the house after a day at work, you're not anxious to begin on any paperwork that you brought home from your job.

What you can and should do, however, when your child arrives home from school is to make a "game plan".

First, assess the quantity and nature of the homework! "Guesstimate" the amount of time that will need to be spent and "prioritize" the tasks. Check out the need for resources (a trip to the library, time on the computer), and the need for your assistance (which parent is the most appropriate to help with math or Spanish, for example. And when are they available?).

Your daily interaction with your child to make a "homework game plan" is one of the most powerful role-modeling strategies you can use to instill time-management/organizational skill in your child.

Homework in the Kitchen

The kitchen table may be the best place for your ADD/ADHD/LD child to study.

It is a curious fact that many children and adolescents have the belief that while they are studying alone in their rooms, the rest of the world is having a good time: "Out of sight and Out of mind." Your child needs to "see" others working - even if you're balancing your checkbook or making sandwiches for tomorrow's school lunch.

The benefits to having your ADD child doing homework in the kitchen include:

1. You can redirect him/her when they get "off-task".
2. You are more available for assistance when they need help.
3. You can play "secretary", writing down answers for them or copying problems for them from their math book so that their efforts can be targeted at understanding the skill, rather than the mechanics of writing/copying.

Remember, ADD students often have a small-motor control problem as part of their bioneurological condition. Their "messy" and laborious writing is not just due to laziness or carelessness. It is a legitimate disability.

Mnemonic Hooks

Learning how to study spelling words isn't as easy as it sounds. Unfortunately, writing a missed spelling word twenty-five times probably won't do the trick, especially if you want your child to "own" the word (long-term memory), not just memorize it for the test (short-term memory).

There are three components to owning a spelling word: identifying phonetic components (letter-sound associations), adding context clues (mnemonic devices), and visual imagery.

Phonetic components of spelling words are best learned by having lists of words that share a phonetic pattern, such as oil, toil, foil, coil, appoint, etc.

Non-phonetic word spelling is best studied with meaning attached, a "mnemonic hook". For example, in the word 'lonely', the 'e' is silent. A mnemonic hook would be to think, "One person can feel lonely", thus integrating the silent 'e'. Another example would be the word, 'accident'. The mnemonic hook would be, "two cars (cc) crashed into each other". Thus the double 'c' is integrated. Children love the fun and creativity of thinking up mnemonic hooks, and these hooks really are worth the time and effort. They work!

Imagery (visual images) may be very helpful to internalize spelling, especially if your child is a visual learner. It helps to see the word by itself on a separate piece of paper, say the letters out loud, close your eyes and try to see the word, and then try writing the word as you say the letters again. Then your child should compare what he/she has written with the correctly spelled word on the piece of paper. If he/she does this comparison after each word, they will focus on the area they may have spelled incorrectly. If the parent or the teacher is the one who marks the mistake, your child may not have as powerful an image of the "trouble spot".

Multiple Choice Tests

Many ADD/ADHD students do poorly on multiple choice tests because it is difficult for them to keep their focus of attention on the appropriate answer when they are distracted by several stimuli. They may impulsively guess at an answer without even going back over the question to see if their answer "makes sense".

An effective strategy for multiple choice questions is to read the question, "cover over" the answer choices, and think of what would make sense as potential answers. This "anticipatory" thinking focuses attention. Then when the choices are uncovered, the student will at least be "in the ball park" when looking for an approximation to their answer prediction.

This test-taking strategy is effective with all students of all ages. It becomes especially important when taking the ACT or SAT where all of the questions are multiple choice.

Parents' Role during Homework

It is a myth that either parent is equally capable of helping their children with homework. Each

parent has individual skills, tolerance levels, patience, and personality traits. One may be more successful working with a particular child's needs, learning style and personality than the other; not to mention the ability to understand and explain a particular subject matter. Time availability is still another factor. This issue can be especially difficult for single parents.

Talk to your child's teacher. Some schools have before or after school study clubs. Many teachers are willing to help students 1:1 during study halls or before or after school.

Poor Handwriting

Students of all ages, who have ADD/ADHD or LD, often have difficulty with small motor control and the organization of space. One successful coping strategy is to use graph paper for written work. By writing one letter per square, the student can better organize the space, using one square between words.

This strategy is also useful for math. By writing one digit per square, the student can line up columns correctly before calculating. This is especially helpful for multiple-digit adding, subtracting, multiplying, and for long division.

Graph paper is available in varying grid sizes. Younger children can use grids as large as one inch and then progress to smaller grids. You can even buy notebooks of graph paper so that it is available for both school and home.

Try it. It works!

Study in the Test Format

An important test-taking strategy is to study for the test in the same “format” as the test itself. For example, we often quiz our children orally for their written spelling tests. They may be able to spell their lists words accurately when they say them aloud, but when they take the “writing” weekly spelling test they may misspell some of the very words they had spelled to you orally the morning before the test. What appears to be a “memory” problem is actually a mismatch between study format and test format.

So if the test is written, you should be sure to have them “write” the words down as you dictate them. Format can even apply to manuscript writing vs. cursive writing. Your child should practice writing the words in the same print style that will be required for the test.