

Organizational and Time Management Skills (Quick Reference Tips)

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Organization involves the ability to establish the tasks that you need to do, by when and how. Part of organization is understanding the requirements of the task. Being 'organized' is a crucial skill not only for academic success but for life. Organizational skills will look very different depending upon the age of the student. Students in early elementary will require more parent support, set-up and cueing to help organize but the goal would be to actively try to fade prompting and support provided to promote independence with these routines. Establishing consistent expectations and habits will help as students grow and move through their academic career.

Home activities can be done to improve organizational skills:

- **Use visual cues/ "to do" lists** - help to remind us what needs to be done or packed to support help develop memory of the tasks or the steps in the routines. Get your child to tick activities off as they complete them.
- **Establish and stick to a routine:** Routine helps memory and allows your child to 'chunk' a group of tasks together. This may involve establishing a consistent homework time and location.
- **Break large tasks into smaller ones** wherever possible and discuss and plan the sequence of tasks through to completion.
- **Visualization:** Encourage your child to visualize the steps to a task to help determine what items are needed or what steps come next. When it is hard to know where to start, start with the end in mind and work backwards to see if the items or steps can be recalled in reverse. For some children, this gives the task more functional meaning and then organization comes more easily.
- **Assign chores that involve sorting or categorization:** Grocery shopping, emptying the dishwasher, sorting photos, cleaning out a closet, and other tasks that involve pre-planning, making lists, or arranging things are great choices.
- **Cook together:** Cooking teaches measuring, following directions, sorting ingredients, and managing time – all key elements in organization. Involve your child in meal planning and challenge them to help you put together a shopping list.
- **Use containers and closet organizers:** Help the child to physically organize their room and/or workspace. Explore CLEAR containers and/or labels as much as possible to make it a quick and easy visual reference. Have your child return these items to the bin each and every time they are finish so it is ready for next time it is required.
- **Explore use of alarms or timers (whether it be on phones, computers, stove/microwave timers)** – explore use of timers to cue when to start homework, finish a break or transition away from a preferred activity. Recognizing again that early elementary students will require 'set-up' support with alarms but quickly can develop it into a supportive habit.

Agenda tips:

Early elementary students will be learning how to use day timers but it can so helpful to get into a routine of 'checking it together' and learning how to use to properly. As students get older, they should be more independent with this but again can be a helpful daily check.

- Write down homework assignment with **specific** details including page numbers, questions to answer, format guidelines etc.
- Write down any supplies you will need including textbooks, notes, worksheets, binders etc.
- Write **NO HOMEWORK** or **NHW** rather than leaving blank pages
- Explore using abbreviations such as **WS for worksheet, T for test, PG for page**

Children often live in the "present" and may need support to consider all their schoolwork requirements for the week. For example, there may not be homework that particular Monday night but important to consider that there is an assignment due and a test on Wednesday/Thursday and sport practice on Tuesday night. Helping students to look at their 'full' week can help to prioritize and manage their time more effectively and efficiently.

Time Management Strategies:

Time management involves **THINKING** skills to complete activities on time, plan the day (including what **NEEDS** to be done and what we **WANT** to get done) and beginning to guess how long something will take.

- On the weekend or night prior, write the schedule of activities to be completed in the morning...have your child figure out order of activities (I.e., some children like to eat breakfast before getting dressed etc.) important to 'guess' how long each task takes and then actually time it.
- Many students underestimate how long it will take to complete an assignment **OFTEN** because they are not organized. Estimating the time to complete a task can help stay on task and become more efficient.

Workspace ideas:

- Pick a location with minimal distractions and disruptions. Some students do best in their room whereas others require more supervision to keep them on task.
- Find a solid, flat desk or table to work at. It should be clean and uncluttered. Working on the floor in the living room or the couch is not as effective or ergonomic.
- Sit in a comfortable, straight back chair. Good posture promotes increased blood flow to the brain.
- Work in a well-lit space. Spaces that are too dark tend to create mental fatigue and eyestrain. May need a tabletop lamp to provide additional lighting particularly during the winter months.
- Work in a quiet space or one with low level of background noise. If the home is more noisy, potentially consider noise blocking headphones or low level 'white noise'.
- Avoid having television on or phones close by as this will increase the likelihood of becoming distracted.
- Have a healthy snack and water available.
- Take periodic breaks. The average worktime for a middle student would be 45 minutes with 10-15 minutes break. Focus time is approximately 5 minutes per year of student age – i.e., 8-year-old student = 40 minutes). For breaks, stretch, walk around and refresh the water.

Additional possible resource items to consider:

- Backpack checklist luggage tag (printable for older and younger students) – customizable
- *Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary Executive Skills Approach to Helping Kids Reach their Potential* – by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare (available on Amazon or from Indigo)
- *Smart but Scattered Teens: The Executive Skills Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential* – by Richard Guare, Peg Dawson and Colin Guare (available on Amazon or from Indigo)