

Homework 101

BY VICKI SIEGEL

Back to school means back to homework. It may also mean arguments, tears, and frustration, because homework demands more discipline and consistency than many AD/HD kids (or any kids, for that matter!) can muster. But you can make homework easier by creating a routine built around three key questions: When? Where? and How?

1. When?

■ **SCHEDULE HOMEWORK FOR A SET TIME EACH DAY.** Base this on your child's temperament. Perhaps he's at his best right after school, or maybe after an hour of downtime. Avoid late evening, which for most children is meltdown time.

■ **BE CONSISTENT FROM DAY TO DAY.** If after-school activities make that impossible, post a daily plan or weekly calendar in your kitchen that includes homework start and finish times each day.

■ **SCHEDULE ENOUGH TIME TO COMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS** without rushing, based on your child's grade level and history of completing assignments.

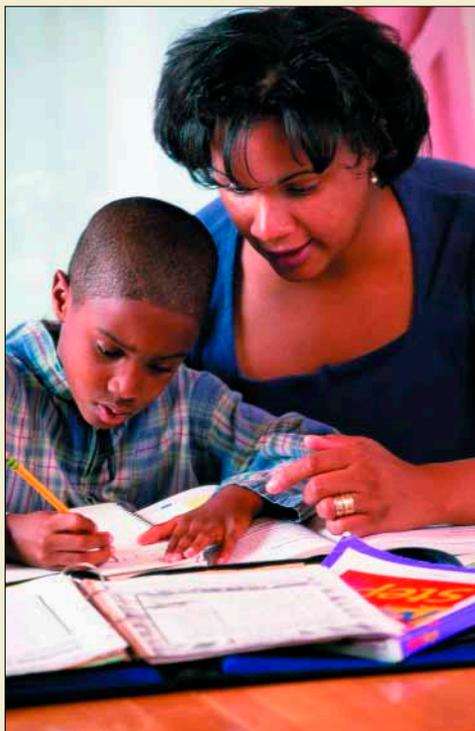
■ **GIVE ADVANCE NOTICE OF HOMEWORK TIME.** This is important, because AD/HD kids don't easily shift from one activity to another—especially from fun time to work time. You might say, "You can play for 15 more minutes, then come in for homework."

2. Where?

■ **HELP YOUR CHILD SELECT A HOMEWORK PLACE.** Try the kitchen table, where she can spread out materials. Or perhaps your child would like to sit at a desk in the quiet den.

■ **STEER CLEAR OF PROXIMITY TO ELECTRONICS** (TV, CD player). But if your child concentrates best with soft noise, try some gentle background music.

■ **STAY NEARBY** (if possible). AD/HD kids concentrate better when they know you're close by. If your child needs to use the bathroom, remind him to come right back afterward. After he leaves the bathroom, remind him to return to his work.



3. How?

■ **SET UP RULES.** Draft and print a sheet that specifies: homework start and finish times; place; when and how long breaks are; and that you will be nearby to help her understand assignments, get organized, offer support—but not do the homework for her.

Avoid arguments—calmly refer her to the Homework Rules.

■ **HELP HIM START.** Make sure your child knows what the assignment is and how to proceed. Offer assistance that matches his learning style. For a verbal processor, read directions to him or have him read them out loud; for a visual learner, show him how to use highlighters and colored markers to outline key words and sentences.

■ **KEEP HIM GOING.** If your child tries to stop before he's finished, encourage him to go on a bit longer, and remind him there'll be a break soon.

■ **GIVE HER A BREAK.** AD/HD and LD kids may become fatigued due to distractibility, challenges to concentrating, frustration, and restlessness. Help your child recharge by scheduling frequent, short breaks.

■ **CHECK IN AT THE FINISH.** Review your child's work to see if it is complete. If your child consistently takes more time than she should, speak to her teacher to see if he's willing to adjust the amount of homework.

■ **OFFER PRAISE.** Compliment your child when he stays on task, works with focus, is creative, and so on. Be specific. Say, for example, "I like the way you concentrated on that problem and stuck with it until you solved it." Give him an acknowledging pat or a squeeze mid-homework, too.

■ **GIVE REWARDS.** It's OK to offer a "prize" to motivate. For a younger child, try extra playtime, a favorite snack or game, or a special read-aloud; for an older child, a favorite TV program, computer time, or phone time.

■ **STICK WITH IT.** A new homework routine requires solid commitment. It takes one to three months for a routine to become a habit—even longer for a person with AD/HD. But the payoff is discipline, self-control, and success-building skills.

Vicki Siegel coaches and teaches programs for AD/HD and LD adults, students, and parents. Find out more at www.next-step-coaching.com.