

Avoiding Homework Battles

Addressing homework issues is critical since it is one of the major reasons ADDers fail in school. Almost every parent with a student with ADD has been on the front lines of homework battles. Keep in mind that the homework doesn't have to be exhaustive to be effective. The National Education Association and the Parents Teachers Association recommend 10 minutes of homework per subject. In other words, a sixth-grader would spend roughly 60 minutes per evening on all homework. If teachers seem to be piling it on, have a friendly discussion with them. The strategies below can further shorten completion time and reduce stress at home. Consistent routines—in the classroom and at home—will help your child finish before you know it.

SOLUTIONS

IN THE CLASSROOM

1. **Post assignments on the board.** Write the homework assignment in a specific location 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 some kids, ask another student to write the assignment and discreetly give it to the child. Posting assignments to the school's website is also very helpful.
3. **Appoint "row captains."** At the beginning of class, these designated "leaders" should take up completed homework and at the end of class, check to see that homework assignments are written down by each student in her row.
4. **Develop a plan with parents to ensure homework returns to school.** Talk with parents of students who consistently forget to bring their homework to school and help them develop a plan for home. For instance, suggest that they purchase a color folder for all completed work. Parents can double check that homework is completed, put in the color folder and placed at the designated family collection point ready for the next day.
5. **Assign the appropriate amount of homework.** Some students with ADD work slowly and are easily frustrated. Assigning just the odd-numbered math problems lets a child demonstrate what he learned in class without pushing him too hard. By assigning homework that is neither too difficult nor too long, teachers increase the likelihood of the homework being completed.
6. **Send parents a list of suggestions for productive homework sessions.** Parents may want to help their child but don't know exactly what to do. Providing them with tips could help. Two strategies you might mention: 1) establish a set homework time with input from the student; 2) find a quiet location with good lighting and a clear work space and stock the area with paper, pencils, a calculator, and a computer.

AT HOME

1. **Ensure that assignments come home.** If your child has trouble copying homework assignments, alert his teacher. She may allow him to read assignments into a cassette recorder, or may be willing to e-mail them to you at home.
2. **Develop a plan for tracking homework assignments.** Encourage your child to write every assignment down in his daily planner. As a backup, check whether assignments are also posted on a school website. Also get a phone number for a student in each class who would know the assignments. Bottom line for high school students—find a method that works for the student. One high school senior preferred to write his assignments on a 3x5 card preprinted with his classes and carry it in his jeans pocket. The card was always with him and wasn't easy to lose.
3. **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 will give you a good idea that something is amiss if your child says he doesn't have any homework in that subject two nights in a row.
4. **Schedule a five-minute break for every 20 minutes of work.** Concentration takes a lot of energy for kids with ADD. Short, frequent breaks help them recharge.
5. **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 may consistently take longer than expected.
6. **Talk with the teacher.** If homework sessions are frequently emotionally exhausting, work with the teacher to determine if assignments seem too long or too difficult for your child (see "Lightening the Homework Load").
7. **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 their sleep. Most medications given earlier in the day have worn off by late afternoon. When medications are working, students can stay focused, complete homework more quickly, and are more likely to remember the material they studied.
8. **Monitor your child's progress with a daily or weekly report via a phone app like "Remind.com"**. Daily and weekly reports forewarn you when your child is in danger of failing and is in need of more supervision at home. Most ADHDers can't afford to get behind on homework assignments; zero grades add up very quickly. The snowball effect of having to make up several assignments in one evening or weekend is overwhelming.

The Remind.com app allows the teacher to send homework assignments or reports will help you and your child identify missing homework assignments, dig through the stack of completed assignments, and promptly return missing work to the teacher. Younger children need more frequent feedback, so a daily report may work best for them. Older students may respond better to weekly reports.

9. **Request an extra textbook for home**—Students with ADD are notorious for sitting down to do homework, only to realize that their book is still at school. Once a student with ADD falls behind it is very difficult for them to catch up. So having access to a book every night is essential. Since many schools have a limited number of books, you may have to purchase the textbook.

10. Lightening the Homework Load

Education experts Sam Goldstein and Sydney Zentall report that many teachers underestimate how long students with learning challenges take to complete homework. For example, the teacher may think it will take only 30 minutes to finish when the student with ADD may spend an hour and a half working on it.

If this is the case with your child, talk with your teacher about using this strategy: The teacher estimates the anticipated time for finishing a homework assignment, and sends a note home or e-mails the parents. The student or parent writes down the time it took to complete the assignment and returns it to the teacher.

If there is a significant discrepancy between the times, talk with the teacher about shortening assignments for your child.