

Surviving Homework – A Guide for Teens with ADHD and their Parents

Joanne Steer and Kate Horstmann

Homework is one of those issues that can easily become a challenge for any young person. As a result, it can also develop into a point of conflict between them and the individuals supporting them at home and school.

ADHD AND HOMEWORK

Just as ADHD impacts on the ability to focus on, organize and complete work at school, it influences a young person's ability to complete homework tasks. However, there a number of additional factors that make homework even more challenging, including:

- Reduced supervision provided by adults for this task, resulting in greater demands for monitoring their own attention/focus.
- Limited available help in structuring and organizing themselves, including problem solving individual homework tasks and also coordinating and prioritizing their overall homework and assignment load.
- Impact of fatigue after a long day at school – remember that these young people need to work extra hard all day just to focus for short periods of time.
- Internal drive to seek movement and stimulation, which is even stronger after a day of sitting down at school.
- Desire to have fun and attempt easy tasks with guaranteed success, particularly after a day of struggling at school with limited choice/control.

Together, these considerations pose significant hurdles. It may take additional planning and support to ensure that the young person with ADHD can either clear these or negotiate around them!

CHALLENGES AT HIGH SCHOOL

It is widely recognized that the volume of homework dramatically increases in high school. In addition, young people are expected to organize multiple projects and juggle various deadlines with few reminders. Often these increased demands are also competing with a more complex life outside school, including sports, hobbies, friendships and steps towards greater independence. Some of the common difficulties seen include:

- problems recording homework – not written down, written down incorrectly, or unable to locate where it is written down
- avoidance, procrastination and/or opposition to completing homework at home
- rushed homework completion with poor quality of work
- difficulties organizing work – not knowing when things are due, not recognizing how long things will take, forgetting projects and deadlines
- forgetting to take homework to school or to hand it in.

Making a Homework Plan: Top Tips for Young People

When it comes to writing your plan, some important things to include could be:

- where you will write down the homework you have been given in class
- how much time you will spend on your homework (for each night and the weekend)
- where you will complete your homework
- what time of day you will complete your homework
- how you will structure your homework time to help you concentrate (e.g. have regular breaks, start with the hardest work first, use a checklist)
- how you will organize your homework so that you remember to take the right books home with you and take the right piece of work to school on the right day
- how your parents might be able to help with parts of your homework, such as helping you plan and map out essays, or helping to organize your calendar and due dates
- when your parent or caregiver can check your homework diary or homework to make sure you are keeping up without having to hassle you about this all the time

- making a list of classmates to call if you forget details or have questions
- what rewards you will give yourself after you have completed a piece of homework

When you write your plan it is a good idea to get everyone to agree to it (and maybe even sign it) and then put it somewhere where everyone can check it as reminder.

Surviving Homework: Top Tips for Adults

If homework is a challenge for a young person with ADHD, consider the following tips:

- Work towards the young person becoming more **independent** and taking on responsibility for their work. Tools like timetables and checklists can help with this.
- Offer **specific homework help at home**, such as devising a work plan, starting individual tasks or problem solving if they get stuck. This avoids the impression of “nagging”.
- Attending **homework clubs** at lunch time or after school can be really effective.
- **Consider motivators.** These can be “natural” rewards such as fun activities after homework is complete, or more artificial (but effective) strategies such as earning tokens towards a specific reward.
- **Using a computer** can help with motivation, concentration and legibility of work.
- Considering the genuine difficulties experienced by young people with ADHD, it can be both highly effective and valid to **reduce the volume of homework demands.**