

OTMP Skills and the Home-to-School Connection

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Ask parents what frustrates them most about their children's academic performance, and the answers you get will likely sound something like this:

"I can never get him to start his homework on time, and then he's up way too late finishing it."

"She says she doesn't have any homework, and then I go to parent-teacher night and find out she's missing seven assignments."

"His backpack weighs a ton and it's like a black hole. I go through it and find notes to me that were sent home six months ago crammed at the bottom."

When students struggle with organization, time management, and planning (OTMP), it can be exasperating for parents. OTMP difficulties not only affect students' functioning throughout the academic day, they often have a significant impact after school. The organizational demands of homework time are particularly high: students must remember what work they have to do (requiring that they wrote it down completely and correctly), have the materials that they need to do the work (requiring that they remembered to bring all needed items home and have them stored in a place where they can be easily found), and manage their own time for completing work. On top of this, much of the home-to-school connection depends on students' OTMP skills. Parents rely on their children to bring home accurate information about assignments and grades, to deliver any school communications, and to bring messages to teachers, permission slips, and other materials from parents back in to school. For families with a child who forgets to record assignments, leaves materials at home or school, saves work for the last minute, and fails to bring home accurate information about his or her progress, stress can mount and, ultimately, academics suffer.

Schools can help ease this tension by offering formal programs teaching OTMP skills to their students. Recent research by the Child Study Center at New York University Langone Medical Center shows that providing quality OTMP programs to students can have a profound impact at home. Parents report after participating in OTMP programs, family tension around organization, time management, and planning significantly decrease.* In addition, overall family functioning improves, with families experiencing increased cohesion, greater expressiveness, and reduced levels of general conflict.* When a child is more organized, family life runs more smoothly and parent-child interactions are more positive. On top of this, students' academics improve,* an accomplishment that can serve as a source of shared pride between parents and students.

These findings point to a key positive effect of OTMP instruction – strengthening the school-to-home connection. When parents see schools going the extra mile to provide services that improve family life, their investment in the school builds. This is bolstered by the fact that OTMP instruction offers a perfect opportunity for parents and schools to collaborate on a common goal. Since so many OTMP skills are practiced, supported, and reinforced at home, parent involvement is critical to effective OTMP instruction. With parents feeling the effects of a student’s OTMP deficits every bit as much as classroom teachers, there is strong motivation for parents to team up with teachers to improve their child’s OTMP functioning. And as an added bonus, a child with effective OTMP skills is better positioned to help keep the home-to-school connection strong, by reliably relaying information between home and school, and keeping parents well-informed of his or her assignments and academic progress.

The primary goal of OTMP instruction is to offer students a skill set that will help them succeed in school and in life. But fostering a sense of teamwork and collaboration between parents and schools is a substantial secondary benefit. When parents have the experience of working together with their school on a goal that successfully improves their day-to-day lives, a sense of trust and partnership is established. By offering OTMP instruction, schools can both help parents make their family time happier and more harmonious and build a collaborative and constructive relationship between school and family.

*These statements are based on research findings on the Organizational Skills Training (OST) Program, a comprehensive OTMP-training program that included individual clinic-based meetings with students as well as parent and teacher components. The InCommand program is based on the instructional elements of the OST Program. OST Program researchers Drs. Howard Abikoff and Richard Gallagher are Program Advisors for the InCommand Program.