

Helping Students with ADHD Organize

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Many students struggle with organization, time management, and planning, but for students with ADHD, these problems are often magnified – chronic late assignments, disastrous book bags, non-existent planners. Challenges with organizing are part of the symptom profile of ADHD, but with some extra support, students with ADHD can develop an effective set of organizing skills. Here are some ways teachers can help support students with ADHD – or any student – to become expert organizers:

- Rather than just listing assignments on the board, prompt students to write them down. Be sure to leave ample time for even the slowest writers to get everything down.
- Do regular “surprise checks” on students’ planners. Look to see if students have written down that day’s assignments completely and correctly. Give praise or points toward a reward for accurate assignment lists. The more often you can do this, the more effective it is.
- Help students create a system for organizing their papers and then provide periodic checks that they are keeping up with it. Praise students’ persistence, which is particularly difficult for kids with ADHD.
- Have students create lists of the things they regularly need to take home in their backpacks and have them attach the list to the inside of their bags. When packing up for the day, prompt students to consult their lists and make sure they have everything they need.
- Kids with ADHD can have trouble estimating time. Have students practice by guessing how long a classroom activity will take them to complete and then timing themselves to check their accuracy.
- Students with ADHD can get overwhelmed when planning long-term assignments. Have a meeting with students and help them break down a large project into steps and then schedule each step into their planners. Check in with students along the way to monitor their progress. Help them

to avoid feeling discouraged if they fall behind – instead, help them problem solve how to catch up.

- Please don't assume that you can stop reminding students with attention disorders to use your suggestions. They have trouble keeping ideas for actions in mind, so prompts will probably be required for a long time. Praise them for going along with your prompt and remembering what actions go with that reminder.
- Some students, especially those with attention disorders, may require more time and more direct individual help from a mental health professional to successfully learn and apply organizational skills. Don't be afraid to consult with mental health professionals and the child's parents if you do not see progress or if the child becomes very frustrated with the methods and suggestions you can provide in class.
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY...** remember to praise small steps along the way! For a student with ADHD, making changes that result in forgetting two assignments a week, when they used to forget five, requires a great deal of effort. However, what gets noticed is typically the two missing assignments, rather than the three they remembered. This can be frustrating for students, and cause them to give up. Praising student progress, no matter how small, keeps students moving forward on the path to organization!