

Helping Secondary Students with ADHD Succeed

STUDENTS WITH ADHD AND HOMEWORK

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



Five Different Approaches

- In Your Own Hands
- Parent Monitoring
- Jump-Start Study Program
- Coaching
(Including *Tips for Coaches*)
- The Combined Approach

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Introduction

“I’ve tried everything!”

Parents of students with ADHD feel like frustrated failures when it comes to homework. They’ve invested in what feels like a hundred assignment pads. They’ve probably tried the odd day/even day backpack routine. They’ve sat with them, read to them, coaxed them, and blamed them. Many have hired tutors and encouraged study skills classes.

When parents see college looming in the near future, they fear their child will not have the self-discipline to succeed. They try to let their child handle it on his or her own, only to read report card comments about missing assignments.

Then parents tighten up. No more TV. No license until “you show us you are mature enough to handle responsibility.” And while these incentives may help temporarily, everyone seems to float back to the old way. Question: “Do you have any homework?” Answer: “Nope, did it in school.”

This booklet acknowledges the fact that people with ADHD struggle with school and may always do so. While there may be no life-changing solution, this booklet stresses lifestyle changes—not short-term fixes. It offers a way of life rather than a response to grades.

In this booklet parents will discover five approaches to help their child learn better self-control over the most difficult areas of life for a person with ADHD.

1. In Your Own Hands
2. Parent Monitoring
3. The Jump-Start Program
4. Coaching
5. The Combined Approach

First, let’s review some facts and then read the approaches.

Facts About ADHD

1. ADHD is more a problem of maintaining interest than simply paying attention.
 - Implication—The student needs to find ways to make school tasks more interesting (audio books vs. traditional reading).
2. Adults with ADHD typically plan for events falling only within the next 12 hours.
 - Implication—Students need to find ways of extending the window (for example, view the homework due tomorrow as a task for this afternoon).
3. Students with ADHD run 30% delayed in maturity, so a 16-year-old has the maturity in many areas like that of an 11-year-old.
 - Implication— Parents need to structure or teach their child how to structure the homework issue, just as a parent would for a fifth or sixth grade student.
4. People with ADHD have a distorted sense of time.
 - Implication—Studying for 15 minutes can feel like an hour. When having fun, an hour can feel like a few minutes (“I’ll study in a minute.”)
5. Distractions during study time can decrease the amount accomplished.
 - Implication—People with ADHD tend to need background noise, such as music, to help block distractions.
6. It is hard to understand what is read when the mind jumps to other more interesting topics.
 - Implication—Many people with ADHD listen to the audio book as they read. The variations in the reader’s voice tone make the words more interesting and keep the mind from wandering.

In Your Own Hands

This approach—In Your Own Hands—stresses individual responsibility with natural consequences for success and failure. Parents tell their child that education is up to her or him. They emphasize they want to see success for the benefit of the child, adding they hope the child makes the right choices to achieve his dreams. Parents stress the benefits of doing well in school, including

- Greater employment opportunities.
- Higher-earning jobs and careers.
- Increased feelings of self-accomplishment.

With the In Your Own Hands approach, the child decides when to study, where to study, and what to study. The approach encourages parents to offer help and to inquire about school performance in general terms: “How’s school been going these days?”

Unfortunately, because this approach works well with students who do NOT have ADHD, many parents may try this approach unsuccessfully with the ADHD child.

This approach fails with the ADHD child because

- School work is so repulsive to them—it’s so boring!
- They do not focus on the future (Remember: adults with ADHD plan only for the next 12 hours).
- ADHD is a biological, motivational problem.
- Finally, parents cannot keep themselves from taking over. Understandably, they can’t sit back and watch the natural consequences take place, since the natural consequences of academic failure have not changed the behaviors of their child.

Parents with motivated children should use this approach with their non-ADHD children. And they should do so without guilt! The child with ADHD is different from the non-ADHD siblings and needs different treatment in order to succeed. Trying to treat everyone the same does not work!

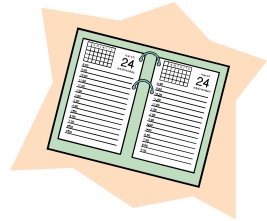
Parent Monitoring

The Parent Monitoring approach involves close monitoring of the student's school performance in an effort to improve homework completion and stimulate better preparation for tests.

In this approach the parent tells the child how the monitoring will take place, choosing among

1. The Assignment Pad.
2. Weekly Monitoring Sheet.
3. Weekly E-mail Communication.

The Assignment Pad involves the student writing the homework, projects, and test dates in an assignment pad each class period. The student is then responsible for having the teacher sign or initial the pad to verify the accuracy of the information. Parents check the pad daily.



The Assignment Pad approach, however, places a great deal of stress on the family. Parents check for awhile but then decrease the frequency. Furthermore, the student always has an excuse why a signature is missing. To decrease intrusion and increase compliance, some parents will choose the most problematic classes for assignment pad monitoring. Other parents offer incentives, such as permitting TV on nights the assignment pad is initialed by all teachers. Other parents will make weekend privileges contingent upon a certain level of compliance—for example—only one omission per week.

The Weekly Monitoring Sheet offers weekly, not daily feedback on homework completion. The child simply takes a form around to the teachers on the last two days of each week (odd/even). The teacher circles "yes" or "no" for completion of all homework and notes missing assignments. Some parents have also asked for grades over the past week.

Parent Monitoring (cont.)

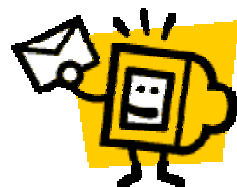
The Weekly Monitoring Form obviously provides frequent and specific feedback. Some parents and students prefer it over the Daily Assignment Pad. Parents can determine consequences on the results of the weekly feedback, just like the Pad.

The Weekly E-mail System involves less intrusion into the child's life. Parents e-mail the child's teachers at the end of each week asking for feedback. The requested feedback can be very specific, such as: "Has my child turned in all homework assignments?" Or the parents can ask for general information: "How did my child do in school this past week?" If the parent has linked consequences to performance, they must request specific information to determine if the criteria has been met for the privilege.

Parents find the E-mail System takes little time and provides valuable information. Likewise, teachers like the reminder and can respond on their schedule. Some parents will e-mail only teachers of problematic classes.

However, the monitoring approach presents negatives for many families:

1. Parents become tired of playing the cop—"When will it ever end?!"
2. Every school night can bring a negative interaction.
3. The most important human relationship, even for teens—the parent/child relationship—can suffer.
4. Monitoring puts the control on parent knowledge, not student responsibility.
5. At times parents may find it difficult to consistently obtain the information on assignments, tests, projects, reports, etc.



The JUMP-START STUDY Program

Students with ADHD frequently wait for the feeling of *wanting* to work on homework. Sometimes parents have similar problems with their own chores at home. What parent cannot wait to get home from work to wash clothes? If parents waited for the feeling of *wanting* to wash clothes, they would have filthy children.

Consequently, many parents put themselves on a schedule. Thursday night is wash night. Perhaps several nights are wash nights! Saturday morning is grass cutting time. The list goes on and on.

Adults find that routines help with tasks they do not find particularly enjoyable. We want to teach the same principle to our ADHD child. Just as we may need personal rules the rest of our life to help with yard maintenance, we must teach the ADHD child to create and follow personal rules about school.



The Jump-Start Program provides increased structure with limited monitoring. Jump-Start essentially sets up a study time and place at home. Together, parents and the child decide when and where study takes place and how long it lasts each day.

The steps are simple:

1. Decide on an appropriate study location. The child's bedroom ("The Castle") is usually not the best place. If the house has a dining room, that can work well as it provides both a private and a public feeling.
2. Decide when the study time will start. It works best if an adult is home during the study time, particularly in the beginning.
3. Decide how long the study time will last. Take the amount of time your child currently spends on homework and start from there. If the child currently spends 15 minutes, then go for 30.

The JUMP-START Program (cont.)

The rules for the study time are simple and clear. The child has to sit in a chair with only school materials. If the child insists on music, make it background or low-level music.

The parent should check to see if the student is in the study area and should ask what assistance he or she can provide. Could he/she call out information? Answer questions? Read material? The parents are not allowed to ask, "What do you have for homework?" or "Have you finished your homework?" You know the answers, so why ask?

How well the student uses the study time is up to him. He can even put his head down on the table. If the child makes that choice night after night, the problem is not the need for structure but something far more serious (for example, major depression or substance abuse).

This program has several benefits. First, it takes the battle of when and where away. Second, the nagging stops. When the child asks, "Why should I cooperate?" promise not to nag. Third, some parents find it easy to provide positive consequences for the student who follows the simple rules of being in the designated place for the set length of time each day of the school week.

The parents and child should agree on a date to begin the program and a date to review following a report card. Both parents and child tend to perform best with time limits for a program.

While Jump-Start stresses the need for the child to make wise choices about how to spend study time, the program allows parents and/or child to gather information about assignment completion. First, try the program without teacher monitoring before asking for weekly feedback. (See the last of five approaches.)

Coaching

If your child would listen to you at this time in her life, you wouldn't need a coach. But...

Many adults with ADHD turn to coaches to help cope with challenges in their lives. Coaches are simply people who help you think through problems, develop solutions, and sometimes even offer advice. However, they are not therapists.

Many parents hire coaches to work with their ADHD child. It is cheaper than counseling, private day school, military boarding school, or medication for the parent! Coaches often can “reach” your child because they are not as close to the situation as you are. They do not share the same history or roles.

This approach is not a punishment for the teen, but teaches him to turn to others—friends, teachers, parents, spiritual advisors, somebody—at difficult times in life. Using others to help yourself is something we all do at some time.

Many high school students with ADHD need to meet with a coach every week. The coach and the teen review the past week—both successes and challenges—and preview the week ahead. They problem-solve together.

- If work was not turned in, what would help solve that problem this coming week?
- If a test was failed, what could be done differently this week?

Who might serve as a coach? Some people hire a college student or tutor. Others might use a friend or relative and swap tasks. For example, the coach might earn meals at your house in return for coaching. Or the secondary student could perform jobs for the coach—for example, provide one hour of child care for every hour of tutoring. Get creative!

Tips for coaches follow.



Tips for Coaches of Teens with ADHD

Basic Assumptions

1. Make the time as “fun” as possible. Remember, they really would rather be doing something more interesting or “funner.”
2. Your goal is to help them be more successful in school—not to like or enjoy education.
3. Be positive about their ability to succeed. They face frustration or failure many times throughout the school day.
4. Your primary focus should not be on their learning to handle school on their own. Rather, they need to learn to use helpful people to reach their own goals. Reinforce that they might need a coach throughout their education.
5. Accept the fact that people with ADHD can be highly organized, very motivated, and quite successful in areas they find interesting; they just do not find school interests them at this time.
6. Help them see the relationship between ADHD and their challenges in school, but don’t preach about ADHD too much.

The Coaching Sessions

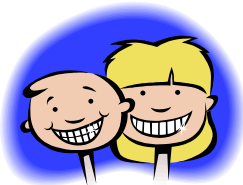
1. Start and stop every session with good news.
2. Review the successes of the past week. Review the challenges of the past week.

Tips for Coaches (cont.)

1. Preview the upcoming five days of school.
 - What assignments are due?
 - What quizzes and tests are on the short-term horizon?
 - What long-term projects are on the calendar?

4. Problem-solve the challenges facing the coming week.
 - How will you remember to study for the history test?
 - Who can help you obtain the materials you need?
 - What can you do to remember to pack all your papers in your backpack?
 - What helped you learn your vocabulary last week that could help you this week?
 - You say you don't understand the novel. Would the audio version help?
 - Who can explain your math to you?

5. Remember, end your sessions with a review of successes, not warnings!



The Combined Approach

Many students with ADHD benefit from combining parts of several approaches. A combination might include the following:

- **Set start and stop times**—The student might have 7:00 PM to 8:00 PM set aside Sunday through Thursday. This provides a clear time to work on school tasks, hopefully in a public/private part of the home and not the student's bedroom.
- **Coaching**—The student might meet with his or her coach every Monday afternoon from 4:00 to 5:00. They would review successes and challenges of the past week and discuss the student's plans for the upcoming week.
- **Monitoring**—The parents might e-mail the teachers halfway between the start of the nine weeks and the interim and halfway between the interim and the end of the nine weeks. The parents and student would then receive teacher feedback about every two weeks, counting the interim and 9-week report cards.

This combined approach should be viewed as a way of life for students with ADHD—not simply “do this until the grades come up.” Coaching can decrease in frequency and/or be taken over by an older sibling, a relative, a family friend, or even possibly a parent. The coaching could drop from weekly to monthly, or even to 9-week or semester increments for higher-achieving students.

The set/stop times should continue throughout the child's education. This is what most successful people do—structure their time to accommodate all facets of life. As for monitoring, successful students keep track of their grades on a regular basis. When unsure, they ask the teacher for an update.

Successful college students with or without ADHD set aside time for studying and know where they stand in relation to grades. Successful people use a combination of approaches to win!