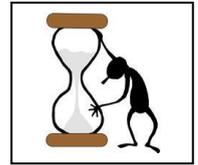


ORGANISING HOMEWORK



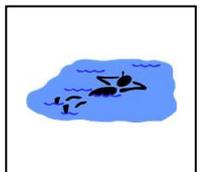
Home work often seems to be a time of stress for the whole family, but is actually designed to allow parents to see the work their child is doing, and provide an opportunity to encourage work that is well done. While a parent might teach as well, the teaching of *school subjects* is primarily for the school!

If a child has learning or social difficulties, then they are likely to arrive home from school worn out with thinking, and perhaps angry that their day has not gone well. This is not a time to have to do homework! Most children struggling with brain work need a de-stressing period after school before they are ready to deal with other people, or any tasks. This is no different than adults experience after a difficult day at work! It costs a child with learning, organisational or behavioural issues far more energy than others to try to understand what is happening to them, and they are markedly hampered by criticism. When a child is acting out, then the stresses have become overwhelming, and their sensory system has gone into meltdown.

Ideally when picking up from school, there would be no questions, no eye contact of note, but instead ensure the child has plenty of space to think without interference. It may help if they walk as far as possible, wear a heavy backpack, wear sunglasses, have a hat to pull down, listen to music, chew gum, and on arrival home, to go on the trampoline, go swimming, ride the bike, dig the garden, dance or listen to music! As many of these options should be used as needed to calm the stresses, before conversations start, or before tasks are demanded.

There are then a number of strategies that might make homework easier to deal with:

- Have an afternoon/evening timetable which includes a clear homework time (a time when it is most likely to work for the child and family). There should be no options (like electronic media or outside play)
- If there is no homework from school, then a child could choose to use the time as a quiet time, or to complete other school tasks (eg projects). It is important to *keep the time aside* as a routine.
- Ensure there are no distractions near the homework zone, which should ideally be *in sight* of parents. TV and all electronic media should be off, toys and playthings out of sight, and no window to watch passing traffic! Where



children do homework together, focus on the ones who are getting on with the task, rather than those who are not.

- If the child is a busy one, then allow chewing gum, background music, snug chair, sloping surface to work on, bare feet, and even a 'Move an Sit' cushion. Time the work period to follow the de-stressing physical activities.
- Check that the work demanded is *reasonable* for the child's ability to understand, concentrate and produce the answers. Short breaks could be built into the session to help concentration (1-2 minute relaxation exercises). All homework should cease at the end of the planned time, Ask the child what the homework is about, and what they are planning to do, before it starts.
- Plan the way the pieces of homework will be done with a 'mini' timetable, designed by the child. As each piece is completed, it should be ticked off or a token placed in a 'Finished' box. It can be useful to alternate writing tasks with reading or other tasks.
- Review the work being done, but comment *ONLY* on work that is correct, reasonable or neat, explaining what is good about it. Answer any reasonable questions about homework if you are able, or provide a way for the child to find out. Repeat this at the end of the work time, focussing on what has been done, and refusing to comment on what has not.
- Let errors go by without comment or recognition. Allow any self criticism by the child to go by without comment (as doing so will reinforce the thoughts about failure).
- Have a basket or large container for the supplies needed for the work that can be easily reached.
- When finished complete by putting all books, homework etc in the schoolbag, and leaving it ready near the door, to go to school the next day.

