

## **REDUCING HOMEWORK STRESS**

### **Three Underlying Principles:**

- Most children will only be effective with the homework process if their environment is organized
- Most children need to be taught specific strategies for time management, and how to do homework
- STAY CALM!!!

### **The C.A.L.M. Method** (from *Homework: A Parent's Guide to Helping Out*, McNerney, Neil)

- Stay Calm in your interactions around homework
- Assess what style your child exhibits with homework: Responsible, Anxious, Disorganized, Blaming, Unmotivated, Defiant
- Choose which Leadership style you will use: The Supporter, The Consultant or The Boss
- Measure whether it is effective

### **Organizing Your Child's Relationship with Homework:**

- Examine your family's schedule: help your child to choose between various activities, and purge other activities from the schedule
- Set up a daily and weekly routine: wake-up times, meal times, chore times, quiet times, homework times, video game/television times, bedtimes
- Schedule a daily homework period: everything else stops during this time; this time occurs whether there is homework or not
- Set up a specific work space for each child: let your child help in its design; the ideal space is well-lit, relatively quiet, limited visual distractions, and has a comfortable and adjustable chair; there should be a desk with drawers with color-coded file folders; other helpful items are a bulletin board, visible monthly calendar, analog clock, and a mirror.
- Set up a homework survival kit
- Create a spot to put backpack and any items that need to go back to school
- Help child to set out clothes each night before bedtime
- Set up a weekly family meeting time: review weekly family activities; review assignments for the week; purge backpack and school binders; cover other goals and contracts for each child
- Set up a family message board, color-coded for each child

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### Organize Your Child's Relationship with School:

- The Backpack: **P**urge, **A**ccessorize, **C**ategorize, **K**eeP it up
- Daily Planner – Set up with a row for each subject (color-coded to match the subject's storage folders), a column for each day, and space set aside to write-in extracurricular activities, notes to self, and weekend reminders.
- The Storage Binder: Color coded tabs for each subject; storage folders for loose papers; extra supplies.

### Teaching Your Child to Complete Homework:

- Daily Homework Time:
  - List all assignments in daily planner
  - Update any long term dates (projects, tests, etc.)
  - Make sure all books, worksheets, and notes are available; if not, problem-solve with child how to get material.
  - Break tasks into small parts
  - Help child estimate time needed for each part
  - Help child to prioritize – suggest doing relatively easy thing first, then go to hardest, then finish with easiest
  - Stay with child for first couple minutes to get him/her going. Then leave the area, assuring you will check back. Lots of positive reinforcement for independent work.
  - Build in breaks – set up “Break Cards”, a deck of cards that have 5-10 minute activities that allow child a break (examples: play with dog, run around block, go to bathroom, get a snack, tell some jokes, listen to some music, play **one** video game).
  - Use a timer, analog clock or beep tape.
- Teach child how to study:
  - Highlighters, note cards, underlining
  - Let child be the teacher
  - Mnemonic strategies: **Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge**
  - Visualization
  - Repetition
  - Time Management: Time Exercises; Analog Clocks
- Reinforcement:
  - Teach child to set personal goals
  - Contracts
  - Spinner Game
  - Strategy for overly-dependent kids: 10 ticket game

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## The Top Ten Strategies to Organize Your Child

1. **Teach your child to use checklists.** Help your child get into the habit of making “to-do” lists. Checklists can be used to list assignments and household chores, and to remind your child to bring appropriate materials to school. Crossing completed items off a list provides reinforcement for the child and helps the child feel a sense of accomplishment.
2. **Set a designated study space.** Children should study in the same place every night where supplies and materials are close at hand. This space doesn’t have to be a bedroom, but it should be a relatively quiet place without people walking in and out. Young children may want their study space near a parent; this should be encouraged, as parents can have the opportunity to monitor progress and encourage good study habits.
3. **Set a designated study time.** Children should know that a certain time every day is reserved for studying and doing homework. The best time is usually not right after school, as most children benefit from some time to unwind. Parents should involve the child in this decision and it should be based on each child’s style of focus. Even if there is no homework, the reserved time should be used to review the day’s lessons, read for fun, or organize the backpack or files.
4. **Organize homework assignments.** Before beginning a homework period, help your child to number the assignments in the order that they should be done. Children should start with one that’s not too long or difficult, but should not save the hardest for last.
5. **Keep organized notebooks.** Help your child keep track of papers by organizing them in a binder or folder. Each class should have its own designated folder or binder. The purpose of this spot is to help keep track of and remember the material for each class and to organize the material necessary for preparing for quizzes and tests. Use color-coded dividers to separate class notes and have separate sections in the binder for things “to be done” and “items completed”.
6. **Conduct a backpack clean-up once weekly.** Children should go through their backpack and folders and notebooks once weekly. During this time, they should clear out any unnecessary papers; add in new supplies; and place all necessary papers in order. Old papers that are not immediately needed should be put in a color-coded file system at home near the work space.

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7. **Keep a Master Calendar.** Keep a large, wall-sized calendar for the household that lists all family commitments, schedules for extracurricular activities, days off from school and any major life events. Note on this calendar when your child has exams or due dates for projects. This will help everyone keep track of each other's activities and will reduce scheduling conflicts.
8. **Prepare for the day ahead.** Before your child goes to bed, he/she should pack schoolwork and books in the backpack. Clothes should be picked out and laid out ready to go. If your child brings lunch to school, have it packed the night before. This will cut down on morning confusion and allow your child to head off to school in a more organized and relaxed fashion.
9. **Provide necessary support while your child is learning to become more organized.** Get in there and help your child set up lists and learn a standard approach to homework. Help your child to get rid of unnecessary papers to keep the filing system manageable. Give your child gentle reminders about calendar dates. Most importantly, be a good model of staying organized.
10. **Stay as calm as possible.** Stress is highly contagious. Try not to make this about the child's lifetime opportunities – it's just a night of homework.

### Helpful Readings

Canter, Lee (1987). *Homework without Tears*. [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Covey, Steven (1997). *Seven Habits of the Highly Successful Family*

Dawson, Peg and Richard Guare (2009). *Smart but Scattered*.

Goldberg, Donna (2005). *The Organized Student*. New York: Fireside Press.

Kahn, Joyce-Cooper and Laurie Dietzel (2009). *Late, lost and unprepared*. Amazon

Levine, Mel (1993). *All Kinds of Minds*. Cambridge, MA: Educational Publishing Svc.

McNerney, Neil (2011). *Homework: A Parent's Guide to Helping out without Freaking Out*.

Zentall, Sydney and Sam Goldstein. *Seven Steps to Homework Success*.  
[www.retctrpress.com](http://www.retctrpress.com).

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