



Homework Tips

Why Is Doing Homework Difficult for a Child with FASD?

The brains of children with FASD are developed atypically, which may result in various behavioral symptoms including:

- Hyperactivity
- Distractibility
- Lack of inhibition
- Learning difficulties
- Difficulties with routines
- Poor motor skills
- Social and language delays
- Impaired information processing abilities
- Difficulty self-regulating

These symptoms can make sitting down to do homework hard to do.

Here Are Some Tips to Help Your Child with Homework:

- Keep in touch with your child's school: A home-school communications book may be the best way to do this. This way, you will know the teacher's expectations; you can communicate with the teacher about what is realistic for your child; and the teacher or staff can log your child's behavior at school. Also, the teachers may be using a different instructional style or process than what you are familiar with. If you know how the school is teaching a skill, you can be more consistent and accurate with reinforcing it at home!
 - Remind school staff to keep comments positive.
 - If the communications book frequently does not make it home, find an alternate way to communicate. A phone call at the end of the day or even email may be the way to go.
- Create a homework environment that is free of distractions and one that limits your child's need to get up:
 - Set up a desk or table in a room that is relatively empty and free of clutter.
 - If the room has a window, face the desk towards the wall so your child is not distracted by what is going on outside.
 - Try to have all potentially needed supplies in close proximity (i.e. pencils, pens, sharpeners, erasers, etc., and maybe a glass of juice with a straw or water bottle for sucking, in case they need a drink).
 - Strategies that help keep your child calm and focused should also be readily available in the



environment (such as fidget toys, wobble cushions, wobble stools, rocking chairs, pressure wraps or vests and/or calming music).

- Try to establish a "homework routine" with your child. Here are tips to help you create this routine:
 - Use visual supports, such as visual timers and/or visual schedules. Using a visual timer may enable your child to 'see' how much time is left for a certain activity. Then, if your child gets off track, you can point to the visual schedule and remind them "first homework, then...".
 - It also helps to break down the task into smaller, more manageable parts (i.e. 15 minutes spent on homework followed by 10 minute break). Continue to do the task in short intervals until all homework is complete. This way, over time your child will learn what to expect.
 - Also keep in mind when setting up a schedule that your child may need time to unwind when they get home from school. For example: Once home from school, give them 20 minutes to unwind; followed by time spent on homework. As a general rule, children with FASD will handle 10-20 minutes of homework per night. If your child has had a rough day, reduce your expectations for homework. You might want to just read the homework to your child rather than pushing to complete it. Be sure to include breaks in between homework periods. You can use strategies such as incorporating movement breaks and heavy work into this routine to help your child focus.

Homework Tips (Continued)

- Be their “external brain”:
 - Even after you have set up the environment and built strong routines, don't forget you will still need to be around to help organize and monitor them while they are working.
 - Teach them to ask for help and provide assistance as needed. Because children with FASD tend to think in “black and white” terms, you will need to be there to help them understand “grey areas”.
 - Discuss problem-solving strategies out loud, and make sure they understand them.
 - Be there regularly to provide encouragement and immediate feedback for positive behaviors.
 - Give your child cues to check-in with their emotions, provide support and redirect them when needed.
 - Many children keep it together for a long school day. Unwinding at home will be very important. Sometimes, play time or engaging in heavy work or movement activities like biking, swimming or running is just what they need to relax. After all, your child's biggest learning tool right now is play!

Children with FASD are all different since their brains develops individually. Some tips may work for your child; some may not. Try different combinations and keep looking for new strategies.

Summary

Help your child develop a positive state for thinking and focusing on what they need to do.

TOUCH

- Ensure they are not wearing any clothing that distracts them.
- Fidgets or listening helpers are a great way to extend focus. They can be any small objects that can be held in the hand. Some like mouth tools like chewy tubes or stir sticks, while others use gum.

SIGHT

- Keep the area as bare as possible, to decrease distractions. You can use a small desk area or a voter's booth to create an office to set the mood.
- Limit the amount of hangings on ceilings, walls and even fridges.
- Natural light is better than artificial, but make sure you have enough, not too much.
- Visual timers can give a more concrete idea of how much time you have left to work, eliminate frequent questions and increase cooperation.
- Visual schedules clearly show what tasks are left to be done, and allow for better transitioning since your child will know what is coming next.

SMELL & TASTE

- Citrus scents are stimulating while vanilla and lavender are calming scents. Be mindful of how your child is affected by any scent, and use it to your advantage.
- Have a glass of water with a straw handy for a quick break.
- Crunchy and chewy snacks like celery sticks, pretzels, or gummy candy may help with extending focus on task.

SOUND

- Work in a quieter area. Avoid TVs, radios, phones, or other people in the room to avoid distractions.
- Your voice is a great tool when teaching. Use its volume, speed and pitch to give information.
- White noise (such as soft music with no lyrics) is sometimes helpful to block out other noises in the home.

JOINT SENSE AND MOVEMENT

- Use a comfortable chair for homework – experiment to find the best one in the house. Some students like to be on a high stool, while others like to be squished between pillows on an armchair.
- Use short and structured movement breaks when you notice their attention failing. Going to the washroom to wash their face, holding a yoga pose for a few seconds, or even doing 10 jumping jacks are examples of movement breaks. All these must have a definite ending so it is easy to go back to work.
- Use a pair of old socks sewn together and filled with beans to make a weighted snake. You can drape it around your child's shoulders or on their lap to provide deep pressure and increase focus.

OTHER

- It is always helpful to have open communication with the school about the amount of homework given and your child's capabilities to complete it.
- Break up the task into smaller more manageable chunks. Only give your child what you know they can do!
- Set a goal and talk about solutions when you get to a difficult part.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
1155 Notre Dame Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3E 3G1
PHONE: (204) 258-6600

