Occupational Therapy Tips for Homework Success

Homework. The term often instills dread among students. Back-to-school time is a good opportunity to review work and study habits that promote academic success. Occupational therapy practitioners are a valuable resource in schools to support students, teachers, and parents as classroom routines and demands are established. The goal is for students to be as independent as possible throughout the school day, which includes successful completion of homework. Consider these tips to help your child establish good habits and reduce the stress of homework.

- Set up a work station at home that is designated for homework. The station should be clear of clutter and extraneous noises such as TV, video games, and radio. This structured area limits distractions and provides a well-organized environment for work.
- Encourage your child to sit in a firm chair with his or her feet planted on the ground or on a foot rest. Consider using an office chair in order to adjust the chair height. The child's back should be supported against the backrest. Good posture prevents back and neck stress and promotes ease in completing assignments. Stretching exercises can also support a healthy back. Encourage your child to take a stretch break from sitting every 20 minutes.
- Promote active play and physical activities that are alternated with more sedentary activities such homework and computer tasks. Carefully placed homework breaks reduce fatigue and support students' attention and concentration.
- Create a system to monitor homework assignments and their completion. Your child should be encouraged to manage his or her schedule by using a planner to organize activities.
- Monitor your child's level of frustration and amount of time necessary to complete assignments. Seek advice when appropriate from school personnel, including occupational therapy practitioners, about your child's performance in school. Work as a team to support his or her academic and emotional needs.
- Develop a homework plan that best meets the needs of your child. Consider sensory needs or distractions, like hunger fatigue or noise, as well as habits and preferences to determine the best times to complete homework assignments. Some children work best before dinner time, and others need a rest break after school before completing homework assignments.
- Work in an area with proper lighting that avoids glare and reflections. Limit eye strain by following the "20/20/20" rule: take a break every 20 minutes, stop for 20 seconds, and look at least 20 feet away from the homework or computer monitor.
- When using a computer, encourage the child to work comfortably and shift position often. If your child uses a notebook computer, set it up with a separate keyboard and mouse and adjust the notebook to be used only as a monitor.

These tips were provided by occupational therapy practitioners who work with America's school children every day.

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