

# Back-to-School DAYS

## Strategies to help kids focus on their schoolwork



Some youngsters experience difficulty when the time comes to focus on their schoolwork. Such difficulties may be linked to a variety of factors, and parents can be overwhelmed as they attempt to identify the root cause of their youngsters' struggles in the classroom.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, roughly 6.4 million American children between the ages of four and 17 have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. ADHD most often occurs in children, and these children may have difficulty with concentrating, paying attention, staying organized, and remembering details. But not all children struggling to focus on their studies have ADHD. Parents who want to help their kids overcome their issues with regard to focusing can consider a host of approaches and strategies.

- Speak with a qualified healthcare professional. Because ADHD is so common, parents should seek the opinion

of a licensed healthcare professional to determine if their child has the disorder. According to the National Resource Center on ADHD ([www.help4adhd.org](http://www.help4adhd.org)), psychiatrists, pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists, and certain licensed counselors or therapists are qualified to diagnose ADHD. Determining if a child has ADHD is a great first step toward helping that youngster overcome his or her struggles in the classroom. A qualified healthcare professional can help develop a strategy to improve focus, and that may include prescribing medication to improve the child's ability to concentrate.

- Speak with your child's teacher. Students who don't have ADHD can still have trouble focusing on their schoolwork, and parents of such students may want to speak to their children's teachers to solve the problem. Educators have significant experience dealing with students who have trouble focusing, and they may be able to make certain

suggestions to help kids focus on their work.

- Minimize distractions at home. Some kids may do well in class but find it hard to focus once they arrive home. That's because home often has far more distractions than the classroom. Once the time comes for your child to do his or her homework, minimize distractions that can compromise his or her ability to focus. Turn off the television and take kids' phones away if they have their own phones. During homework time, only allow them to use their computers for their lessons and not to connect with friends via social media. Parents also should make sure they aren't the distraction. Let kids do their work in peace and quiet, offering to help if need be, but steering clear of kids work areas so they are encouraged to focus and not strike up conversations with mom or dad.

- Make lists. Some kids focus better when they know exactly what they have to do. Encourage such youngsters to make lists of their assignments and check items off as they are completed. Checking items off can give kids a sense of accomplishment, which can motivate them to stay focused on their schoolwork going forward.

- Encourage breaks. A breather every so often can help kids avoid growing tired. Make sure kids don't take up another task, such as playing video games or watching television, during their breaks. But keep in mind that standing up every so often to walk around or get a glass of water can help them stay sharp and energized over the long haul.

## Test-taking tips

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, test anxiety is a form of performance anxiety that can affect even the most prepared students. The ADAA notes that several factors, including fear of failure and a poor test history, can contribute to test anxiety, the presence of which can make it difficult for students to concentrate and may even cause physical symptoms like headache and nausea. Parents of students who are anxious about upcoming tests can share the following test-taking tips with their children, courtesy of the ADAA.

- Prioritize preparation. Test preparation should begin well in advance of the test, as cramming the night before may make students feel unprepared and less confident in their knowledge of the material. In addition, studying at least a week or two in advance of the test date affords students the opportunity to take practice tests in conditions similar to those in real testing situations. That familiarity can calm any nerves they may typically experience when taking exams.

- Develop an effective test-taking strategy. The ADAA recommends students answer the questions they know first before returning to more difficult questions. Doing so may contribute to students' confidence and

calm their nerves as they approach the rest of the test. When tests include essay portions, students can outline their essays before they begin to write so they have a clearer idea of what they want to say and how they want to say it.

- Employ relaxation techniques. Deep, slow breaths and systematic relaxation of muscles can energize students' bodies and make it easier for them to focus. Students can apply such techniques before exams to curb any pre-test jitters they might have and, if necessary, revisit these relaxation exercises during the test if feelings of nervousness return.

- Get enough sleep and eat healthy before the exam. Stress and anxiety are more difficult to cope with when the body is tired, so parents should encourage their children to get adequate sleep the night before an exam. In addition, provide healthy foods for kids to eat prior to the exam so they are not lethargic or hungry once the test begins.

- Don't be afraid to seek help. Plenty of students experience test anxiety, and many schools offer programs designed to help students overcome their test-taking fears. Making use of these programs is a great way for kids to improve their testing performance.

# BACK TO SCHOOL

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