

RETHINKING BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

Broadening homework time to deliberately include building skills such as group work, independent learning, decision-making, self-management, responsibility, and follow-through means rethinking:

- What children are doing and why (motivation)
- Noise levels
- Setting up rules and clarifying expectations
- What adults are doing and how

Look at these common questions or concerns about moving away from the study hall model. Do you share these concerns? Then look at the comments and tips for addressing the concerns. Do these ideas seem do-able? Do you have additional ideas?

1. If children are talking to each other and working together, won't they disturb each other, copy assignments and fail to learn the information for themselves?

☐ Yes, I have this concern

☐ No, this is not a concern

Comments

We know that college students and adults need to be able to work in groups, in different environments, and despite distractions. Yet, we give little time and opportunity for children to build those skills—and it is a set of skills! One picture of homework time has children sitting quietly, working alone. Another is the family room with a group of kids, music playing, and snacks around. They foster different skills.

When the expectation is clear that it is time to do certain kinds of activities or work, we can allow children to find the best ways for them to focus. Just like adults, some prefer working with noise or music—it actually helps concentration. Children need to see that they can interact with friends around homework or other activities, not just play time. And some kinds of school work, such as practicing for tests, practicing reading aloud, or understanding a story, are much better done in pairs or small groups. Promoting peer interaction also provides opportunities for students to take the ‘teacher’ role, building confidence, communication skills, and helping children understand material in different ways.

Our experience in programs involving hundreds of children is that children do better working together in a relaxed, but focused, environment—like working at home, only with more support!

I can try some of these ideas: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Other ideas?

GROUP WORK AND NOISE

- Before asking a group to be quiet, listen to what the talking is about. Are children asking each other questions? Sharing strategies? Comparing answers? These are the kinds of conversations to encourage during homework time.
- Help children generate questions and discussion about their assignments. Encourage them to ask each other questions like, “What are we supposed to do?” “What do you think?” “How do you do this?” “What is this about?”
- Plan an attention-getting signal with children in case the noise level gets too high. Involve children in coming up with the signal or deciding what it should be. You might offer a choice between, “When you hear my voice clap twice!!” or “Countdown 5 to quiet!” or “When I say “peace” you say “quiet!”
- If space allows, offer a quiet space and a talking space for homework and allow children to choose where they would like to work each day.
- In limited space, offer time in the schedule for both individual work and group work to help children develop skills for both settings.
- At the beginning of the year and again at the start of each semester or marking period, have children reflect on their own best work environments. Have a full group discussion about noise levels, working with friends, and how to make it work well for everyone.

2. Elementary school children are too young to make decisions for themselves.

☐ Yes, I have this concern

☐ No, this is not a concern

Comments

Making choices and decisions are skills that can be taught and practiced at any age. For younger children, control the choices more narrowly to things they really can decide, such as, "Would you like to wear the red pajamas tonight or the blue ones?" Note that there is no choice about whether or not to put on the pajamas. During homework time, the question may be, "Do you want to work with Olanna and Rob, or at the quiet table? "

As students gain more responsibility, increase the degree and complexity of choice. Offer only those choices you will honor. For example, if the only options for snack are fruit or cheese, do not ask "What would you like to have for a snack?" if you will not be able to meet a choice of candy and soda. Avoid false questions like, "Do you want to do homework now?" unless it really is a choice to do it now or later. The question might be, "What time will you start working on homework? Do you want a reminder?"

I can try some of these ideas: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Other ideas?

MANAGING CHOICE

- Offer real choices and follow through on the decisions children make.
- Find choice in even simple areas: Which table would you like to sit at today? Which pencil would you like to use? Which assignment would you like to start first?
- Praise children for making decisions and show them how their choices led to success: "Julius, I see you chose to start on your spelling words first. Last week you didn't get them finished when you left them for last. Nice choice."

3. Children won't want to work on homework if there are other options like activity stations or games.

☐ Yes, I have this concern

☐ No, this is not a concern

Comments

When choices are offered during homework time, staff are responsible for teaching children to make choices that will lead to good work habits. If a child chooses to work only at activity stations and neglects his or her assignments, the work doesn't get done. Homework contracts and tracking tools help children set goals, as well as plan and manage their time to get their work done. Activity stations can be developed to reinforce the academic content found in homework assignments. Moving between content-relevant activities and the homework assignment can help make assignments and the learning more meaningful. See page 27 for activity center ideas.

I can try some of these ideas: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Other ideas?

STRATEGIZING ACTIVITY CENTER CHOICE

- Plan activity centers with topics and skills related to what is being covered in school.
- If space allows, set up activity centers in another room.
- Schedule center time for 15 minutes before, during or after the time children will be working on assignments to give every child a chance to participate.
- Use activity center time as a reward for students who meet their goals. Be cautious about only allowing this reward to students who complete assignments or achieve particular grades. Find goals that are appropriate to each student's needs and challenges.
- Involve children in creating expectations for the use of activity centers.