

ORGANIZATION AND TRANSITIONS

People with attention deficits (ADD) or hyperactivity (ADHD) are often thought to be willfully avoiding tasks or lazy. However, there are physical reasons for disorganization and poor follow-through. The area of the brain that initiates behavior, anticipates consequences, and controls short-term memory is underenergized, causing poor task completion. In some people, there is also decreased blood flow to the right hemisphere that handles spatial perception and decision making. This can add to problems of losing things or getting lost. Mark any of the following strategies that you think would help you or your loved one with organization, memory, and helpful habits.¹

ORGANIZATION

- ___ Place important items for school or work on hooks or racks by the door the night before. Have the most organized family member monitor this until it is a routine.
- ___ Designate places for important items at home, school, and work. Place items in their proper location as soon as they are not needed: keys, glasses, purses, lunch boxes, uniforms, bookbags, or briefcases.
- ___ Buy furniture and containers with lots of drawers, shelves, and hooks. Label places for things and keep surfaces uncluttered. Overorganization is important!
- ___ Create file drawers and folders for important papers and schoolwork. Throw out items that are no longer needed.
- ___ Put medications in weekly pill keepers. This makes it easier for others to monitor if medications have been taken until it is a routine.
- ___ Have a weekend box for anything left out of place. Everything in the box must be put away before weekend free time begins. Place a bag of things that need to be put away in front of the TV.
- ___ Do not let messes pile up. Clean up one activity before starting another. ADD people can create chaos.
- ___ Avoid “to do” piles. Whenever possible handle paperwork only once. Throw it away, file it, or take whatever action is needed as soon as possible.

FORGETFULNESS

- ___ Keep a “day list” by the door with everything you or your child might need: keys, glasses, notebook, lunch, snack, medicine, retainer, wallet, or sweater. Make a habit of scanning the list before you leave.
- ___ Have a What-have-I-forgotten? list in your car or on a key chain, or have it memorized: hat, gloves, glasses, assignment book. Make children repeat their list five times as a consequence for forgetting items not brought home. Build the habit of asking the above question every time you leave a place.
- ___ Use a “must remember” bag for nonroutine items that need to come home by placing high-priority items (car keys or snacks) in the bag.
- ___ Call your answering machine and record reminder messages of things you need to do as soon as you think of them. Answering machines with flashing lights by the door are important.
- ___ Use alarm watches for reminders to take medication, start chores, or leave a friend’s house. Set other timers for five-minute warnings before it’s time to leave for school or other activities. People with ADD lose track of time!

¹ Adapted from *Beyond Retalin* by Stephen Garber, Marianne D. Garber, and Robyn F. Spizman (Harper Perennial, 1994) and *Driven to Distraction* by Edward Hallowell and John Ratey (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

- ___ Use assignment books that list homework, tests, and other important dates. Coordinate with teachers and monitor tasks until children establish a routine.

- ___ Buy spiral notebooks with pockets in which to place assignments due the next day, or designate a special homework pocket in bookbags.
- ___ Keep a calendar or planner for all important dates and events.
- ___ Keep notepads and pens in the car, by the bed, or in your purse to write down ideas and things you need to remember to do. Read with a pen in hand for the same reason.
- ___ Schedule weekly errands at the same time so they won't be forgotten.

ESTABLISH ROUTINES

- ___ Wake-up routines may include extra alarm clocks, water sprays, rambunctious pets, ice cubes, or ammonia swabs.
- ___ Bedtime routines are important for both children and adults: bathing, watching (nonstimulating) TV, reading, calming music, and relaxation exercises.
- ___ Be dressed and ready for school or work before eating breakfast or watching TV. There are many instant, nutritious foods that can be eaten on the way to work or school. Prized privileges can be withheld until a child is ready on time for school.
- ___ Set clocks and watches ahead to decrease chances of being late.
- ___ Make lists for routines and put them on white boards or Post-it Notes placed in strategic locations (refrigerator, TV, video control box): feed pets, have snack, put dishes away, do homework, make bed, put belongings away, free time.
- ___ Monitor tasks that require a sequence of actions until it is independently mastered: "What do you need to do next? Next? Next?"
- ___ Use a stopwatch to time how long it takes to complete (part of) a task. Then make a game of gradually decreasing time. Similarly, time how long a person can sit still in the car or at dinner and gradually work on increasing time.
- ___ Break large tasks into smaller units and provide immediate rewards or breaks after each one is complete. Physical activity and stretching may be especially important.
- ___ Make eye contact, announce instructions, say them and have them repeated—"I'm going to tell you what still needs to be done. You need to . . . What did I say?" Use many gestures or sign language if it helps focus attention.
- ___ When something has been left out of place or a step is out of sequence, interrupt what you or your child is doing before returning to the desired activity. This reinforces neural links in the mind.
- ___ Do not start a new task before completing a current one.
- ___ Link undesirable tasks with high-priority activities: Domestic chores must be completed before using the computer. Place pill keepers in front of toothbrushes.
- ___ Train organized family members to remind instead of nag—"I know you meant to . . . Would you do it . . . ?" "How about if the TV goes off after this show until . . . gets done." Keeping expectations realistic will go a long way to increase patience.
- ___ Reinforce routines with rewards. Pick one routine on which to concentrate and keep track of the number of days in a row it is done. Identify a reward and use it each time a record is broken. Once something is done 14 days in a row, it is a habit.