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Homework

Homework is a contentious issue for students with ASD. Many students have a strong resistance to the very idea and have great difficulty completing any homework tasks at all. There are two probable explanations for this; they endure a high degree of stress throughout their school day, and deficiencies in their cognitive skills, particularly their 'executive functioning'.

During their school day, the student with autism participates not only in classroom learning, but has the added stress of learning the 'social' curriculum. They may spend much of their time at school trying to figure out the unwritten rules of social interaction, both in the classroom and school grounds. These students also struggle to interpret verbal and non-verbal language. For many, school is an intense sensory experience that can cause even further distress. Recess and lunch breaks are difficult times that do not give them an opportunity to relax and unwind

Students with autism have poor executive functioning. This affects their ability to set goals, plan, organise and prioritise tasks, manage time effectively, solve problems and stay on task.

The student may need his after-hours time to relax. Assigning homework to a student struggling with the stress of school may be more than he or she can cope with.

Here are some common problems associated with homework and strategies that may be useful.

- **Problem**
The student spends hours on a task when it was only intended to take a few minutes.
- **Suggestion**
Be explicit with task requirements. Define specific tasks and the expected duration of each. Encourage the student to use a timer or stopwatch to manage time effectively.
- **Problem**
Poor time management; student leaves assignments to the 'last minute'.
- **Suggestion**
Give an expected start date as well as a completion date for large assignments. Review progress regularly.
- **Problem**
Memory problems, forgetting homework instructions and resources required.
- **Suggestion**
Use a homework diary. Assign a responsible peer to act as a 'homework buddy' for the student to telephone if he has difficulty or forgets what to do. Fax or email a copy of homework to parents.
- **Problem**
Refuses set homework or does not complete tasks satisfactorily.
- **Suggestion**

The student is likely to have difficulty getting started and figuring out where to begin. Close supervision is needed. Speak to the student's parents about providing assistance and guidance or hiring a homework tutor. If this is not possible, homework tasks could be completed at school during breaks under supervision of a teacher or integration aide. Strategies used for students with ADD or ADHD can also be useful. It may also be motivating to the student to watch a video associated with the topic, ie. if studying a novel, watch a movie or documentary.

- **Problem**

Poor handwriting. The student may refuse to hand in work for assessment because he is self-conscious of his poor spelling or messy writing.

- **Suggestion**

Allow student to use a computer for written assignments.

- **Problem**

Student has difficulty with homework format, eg. essays.

- **Suggestion**

Allow alternative assignment formats, eg. oral reports, demonstration, use of a video or audio tape recorder or Powerpoint presentation. Where sequencing and structuring of written language is a problem, permit students to submit assignments written in 'dot point' rather than essay format.

- **Problem**

Student is not able to explain the formula or reasoning they used to reach a correct answer.

- **Suggestion**

The strategies and thought processes used by the student may be based on intuition rather than conventional thinking. They may be unable to demonstrate or verbalise the steps they used to reach a conclusion however these do tend to be accurate. You may have to accept their reasoning at face value, even if it seems illogical to the neuro-typical mind.