



Accept – don't reject

**15th Anniversary
Greetings from the
Attention Deficit &
Hyperactivity Support
Group of Southern
Africa.
(ADHASA)**

Keeping up with ADD

April 2004

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HAPPIER HOMEWORK HOURS!

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**15 years of service
to the community!!**

Doing homework may be far more difficult for an ADD/Hyperactive child however other children may also struggle. These solutions are for everyone.



I find it most interesting that people often hear a new idea and it means nothing to them but, after hearing it a few times, it suddenly becomes very important information! And so it was with me when 'Executive Function' was discussed at the AD-DISS Seminar: Children with delayed Executive Function seem to have a problem with their management systems – organizing and managing information within the brain.

An orchestra without a skilled conductor could end up making a horrible noise rather than produce the beautiful music expected when so many different sounds are brought together and, in the same way, the ADD child is often denied the results he craves because he cannot "pull it all together" and invariably operates well below expectations. This inability shows up yet again in the homework situation and life is often full of horrible noises with people reminding him of his under-achievement. He needs more help than

the average child and may depend upon this assistance for much longer than other children.

What homework do you have?

It's so much easier for the child to say that he has no homework rather than doing it or owning up to the fact that he didn't even write it down. So if there is a problem with finding out about the homework for the day, then it's a good idea to liaise with the school teacher to ensure that you know what needs to be done. Ask her to check that the homework has been written down, or request that she puts him next to a conscientious child who ensures that it is recorded. Ultimately it takes less time to check that homework tasks have been written down, rather than deal with the consequences if it hasn't been done.



Homework environment

Homework should preferably be done in the same place each day so that the child associates that as a place where he settles down and concentrates. The immediate environment should not be over-stimulating but it is equally important that it is not totally boring. Gentle music in the background helps some children but others find it totally distracting; some cannot study if there is any noise in the vicinity even though they are in general noisy themselves! Have everything nearby that is required for the homework task, such as books, pens, pencils, reference books, paper etc.

When should homework be done?

The ideal time would be in the afternoon, after lunch and a half hour rest during which time the child has

had the opportunity to relax. Many adults underestimate the stresses their children endure at school and do not recognize that their children need the opportunity to unwind.

As parents we demand that our children are achievers and so they lead extremely busy lives often rushing from one activity to the next. Therapies and sports

training demand huge chunks of their time often making it impossible for homework to be done in the afternoons. Many parents both work all day and the only time they can tackle homework is in the evening when the child is tired. Whatever the time, try to establish a regular routine as far as homework is concerned so that the child knows when and where it is to be done. Preferably it should be tackled before, rather than after, their television viewing for the day.

Preparing the child

High achieving and extremely organized parents often cannot understand why their bright children cannot tackle their homework on their own. They do not realize the difficulties entailed for the child as he doesn't know where to start or how to continue once started.

Ensure that the child understands what the homework entails. First give an overview and then show how to break the homework into different tasks, and help the child do so until he is able to do so himself. It may take years for him to acquire this skill but continue until he has mastered it – you are not spoiling the child but rather teaching him organizing skills for life.

Children often cope far better if they know what is expected of them. Give the relevant instruction at the beginning of each task and tell him how long it likely to take for him to com-

Factors affecting homework skills:

- Not able to register a string of instructions
- Poor organization skills
- Distractibility
- Inability to pay attention if not fascinated
- Low muscle tone
- Sensory Defensiveness
- Visual difficulties (eg poor tracking)
- Expectation of criticism and conflict
- Expectation of failure

plete it. If necessary, put a clock in front of him – for some a buzzer would provide an exciting challenge while for others it would only increase anxiety levels. While he has difficulties staying on task, remain in the area and be available to assist when needed. Try and arrange the next break to coincide with finishing of that task so that he can go onto the next task when he sits down again.

Avoid giving a string of instructions to children who cannot remember them – you are only setting them up for failure. All interactions should be based on building confidence and avoiding putting them into a situation in which they are doomed to fail.

Many children constantly fidget while parents are trying to get them to concentrate on their work. This may be symptomatic of the child's discomfort and parents who mutter about it only heighten his discomfort, which makes concentration even more difficult. For some children, fiddling with something (like a stress ball or even their own hair) actually helps improve concentration but it's difficult for parents to work out whether it is helping their child or not! Assist concentration by keeping a glass of water (not cold drink or squash) nearby so that he can take sips whenever he wants.

How long before a break?

This depends upon the child and his attention span. For some it is very short and they struggle to maintain attention for more than five minutes at a time, while others can continue for up to half an hour. Don't demand more than the child is capable of producing at any one period of time – rather start with short work periods and slowly, very slowly, increase

them as the child's concentration abilities improve. Always remember that homework is more about practice and consolidation, rather than attention span!

Short breaks are often just a few minutes during which the child has the opportunity to get rid of extra energy or just clear his head. It could consist of going to the fridge for a glass of milk, or running once around the house, doing scissor jumps, stretch exercises, standing on their head, doing cartwheels across the lawn or swimming a length across the pool. To a certain extent the activity could be linked to the amount of work that has been done. For example, a swim would probably be more indicated towards the end of the homework session rather than at the beginning.

Let them know how much time they have for the break but bear in mind that they usually don't know what is meant by 'two or three minutes' and so be prepared to call them back after their short break. Avoid allowing it to stretch out because that can lead to future nagging to play a bit longer before resuming work.

At the end of the break explain the next task to them and help them get started. This all takes a tremendous amount of time, especially as you are just starting to use these suggestions, but will pay dividends and save many hours of frustration in the future. In addition, each small task comfortably accomplished contributes to a healthier self esteem.

Anything else?

Once the above guidelines have been introduced, then individual difficulties should be taken into account and catered for. It is necessary to understand how, for example, sensory defensiveness or other conditions could be impacting upon the homework situation. There is currently a lot of interest in children's different learning styles and understanding these can also assist with more effective learning.



Raising Essential Fatty Acid (omega 3 & 6) levels in the body through diet and supplementation has often yielded tremendous success with parents reporting children taking more responsibility and settling down more easily to do homework – and producing better work.

Taking consequences

Children must learn to take the consequences of not doing their homework but only if they are capable of doing it in the first place - but one or two very good days in which they produce fantastic results do not mean that they have reached that level of accomplishment!

Giving the child the responsibility of a task that is too difficult is setting him up for failure. A child who experiences repeated failure will become oppositional which could be covert and he doesn't say much but perpetually procrastinates and does everything to avoid situations where he is going to fail yet again. An

overtly oppositional child will argue or become aggressive when faced with a difficult situation. He usually shows much bravado and says he doesn't care ... but he does. He cares very deeply and, although he'll do anything not to show it, he needs your support far more than he needs another attack!

Results are important but never underestimate the value of showing appreciation of the effort that has been put into the work.

Homework completed

The homework has finally been done and somehow we've all survived! The next step is to make sure that it actually goes to school the next day and so help him pack his bags. Initially you would pack with the child's assistance but, as his abilities improve, slowly switch to the child being in control with you helping him and checking that important stuff, like homework and swimming costumes, go to school when necessary.

What about mum and dad

They are busy people and often don't have time to be so closely involved in the homework. However, using these principles and supporting the child while he is still in the junior school could prevent difficulties and save many hours of frustration when he is in the higher grades. It could make a big difference to his attitude to school work.

Implementing the principles above is not necessarily going to solve all problems but they could make life a whole lot easier. When the child becomes aware that homework is a less formidable task and that he has some hope of success, he is likely to become more motivated and assume responsibility for it. Mission accomplished!

Heather Picton

A Big Thank You:

I would like to thank those wonderful people and companies whose generous sponsorships enabled me to attend the ADDISS International Seminar held in Liverpool last month:

- ☆☆☆ **Virgin Atlantic Airways** who sponsored my flight.
- ☆☆☆ **SAIDA** (South African Inherited Disorder Association) who sponsored the Conference Fee.
- ☆☆☆ **House of Health**, suppliers of GLA syrup, for help with the accommodation.

Last month (March) I travelled to the United Kingdom to attend the ADDISS International Seminar on ADD. It was an amazing experience and I returned full of new insights, new ideas and even more excited than ever before. We'll be sharing these new concepts and ideas with our members through our Newsletter which is due to go out in the next few weeks; some will also be included in "Keeping up with ADD" which goes out to all our email friends. Thank you very much to you all – we will be using the information gained to provide an even better service to the community.

If you would like to become a member or be put on our "Keeping up with ADD" email lists, please contact National Office at 011-888-7655.

Keeping up with the Support Group:

The month of May promises to be another busy month for us with lectures to be given to schools, work-shops for university students, and our taking part in the Annual Conference for Educational Psychologists. At the same time we continue preparing for our own Seminar which starts on Saturday 29th May.

As we are celebrating the 15th Anniversary of the Support Group this year it is a good time to review the work we do, and we are planning new services for our members and also upgrading the old.

In addition to the above we are strengthening the foundations of the group, an important part of which is the ongoing training given to all office volunteers and branch leaders. These are the people who represent the Support Group and who can offer the best assistance if they are knowledgeable and confident about what they do.

We do not want to overload a few weary volunteers but would rather man the group with enthusiastic helpers, each of which has a small but important role to play.

We need your help.

If you have a few hours a week to make available to the Support Group, please contact us. We'd love to hear from you. Phone Sandy at 011-793-2079 or Heather at 011-886-7668

Your Diary !!

SEMINAR!! SEMINAR!! SEMINAR!! SEMINAR!!

Are you feeling guilty and inadequate because you are overwhelmed by your child's difficulties (or your own)?

Are you coping fairly well but would like to know the latest information about ADD/Hyperactivity?

Come to our Seminar and meet our fantastic speakers: **Ask your questions - learn from the leaders in the field - and make life easier for yourself and your family!!**

We are very excited about our Seminar to be held on two consecutive Saturday mornings May 29th and 5th June. These two mornings will give complete understanding of your ADD/H child/pupil and the challenges that you both face! Find new and different ways of dealing with the child's irritating habits, and tackle difficult situations with greater confidence. Learn how to expect the best from the ADD/H child.

Quite a few people have taken advantage of our 'early bird' discounts and there might just be time for you to do the same! It makes quite a difference if you are coming along with your spouse, or sponsoring your child's school teacher.

Help us advertise this event by asking your school to mention it in their newsletters, or put up the poster at your school, your doctor or your therapist. Tell them that it will help parents and professionals alike. **Certificates to be presented and CPD points to be awarded.**

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

- As far as we know, the Support Group was the first to hold full day Seminars on ADHD for School Teachers. These Seminars were held in TMI in the mid-nineties before National Office spent a few years in Pretoria.

- The first Seminar for parents was held in 1991. We couldn't find anyone who could video it for us, however our efforts resulted in a 13-part TV series on ADD/H which SATV screened several times over the next few years. Copies can still be borrowed from the Support Group Library.



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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM - Annual Subscription R85-00 PLEASE PRINT

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FAX NO: (.....).....E-MAIL.....

NAME OF CHILD/MEMBER:.....

DATE OF BIRTH:/...../.....

SCHOOL:

SIBLINGS: (Names & Ages)

1 2

3 4

OCCUPATION: Mother

Father

SIGNATURE: DATE:/...../.....

For confirmation of application kindly deposit into ABSA Sinoville Branch, Saving Account No. 907-161-3544.

- Please make all cheques payable to: ADHD Support Group – National Office (Jhb)
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- Please complete the deposit reference blocks below your signature with your printed full name
- Please fax your application form together with the bank deposit slip to (011) 793 4790 or 793 2079.
- Alternatively, post this form, together with your remittance to PO Box 3704 Randburg 2125.