

Helping Your Child Develop Organizational Skills for Success

Presented by:

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The Organized Student:

- Consistently identifies and bring home personal belongings, books, binders/notebooks, supplies, packets, worksheets, etc. needed for HW completion, tests, quizzes, essays, etc.
- Doesn't carry everything they own in their backpacks... candy wrappers, old lunches
- Can locate completed HW and hand it in on time
- Doesn't waste time looking for class notes, handouts and HW
- Can study effectively because they are aware of upcoming tests, have the correct materials and set aside time to study

The Disorganized Student

- Behavioral patterns signaling disorganization emerge at different stages of development.
- Organization is critical to school success
- Some students show signs at an early age
- **Red Flag** for parents and teachers: Children who exhibit telltale signs in early childhood pointing towards impaired organizational skills
- Others may not fall apart until middle school, high school or college.
- What do parents, teachers and students see on the surface?
- Frequently losing HW papers, personal items, pencils, pens, toys, permission slips, assignments, HW
- Messy backpacks, cubbies and desks (can you spot your child's desk right away?)
- Poor time management /organizational skills
- Difficulty developing a plan of action(getting started) and following through
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty organizing thoughts and sequencing ideas
- Difficulty planning ahead
- Academic performance is impacted by weak organizational skills
- The root of the problem is disorganization. It has nothing to do with intelligence!

Elementary Students Are Supported By Teachers

- Elementary teachers spend a lot of time creating structure and organization in the classroom, breaking assignments down, reminding students of due dates
- Procedures are usually well defined and serve as cues for staying organized
- Teachers model the behavior for students and the expectation is that students will follow the rules and procedures with the goal of independence
- Students who don't have innate organizational skills don't internalize the structures teachers set up
- Teachers often rely on visual clues for organizing the classroom. Students who have delays in executive functions or who don't learn visually may not draw connections to the bigger picture and can't transfer the skills they have not developed
- As curriculum demands increase, teachers have less time to teach soft skills
- Specific instruction about the whys and the how may be needed for the disorganized child who is may be lagging behind in organizational skill development
- When a student doesn't grasp the fundamentals of organization, they quickly fall behind and will continue to fall further behind without specific intervention
- Disorganized students are left without an important set of skills—which in later years results in a failure to live up to the expectations of teachers, parents and themselves

Middle and High School Students

- When students are faced with multiple teachers and subjects survival skills of the past may disintegrate.
- Disorganization becomes clearer and more problematic as the academic demands and organizational demands increase
- Frequently seen behavior:
 - Loses or misplaces papers
 - Doesn't hand in assignments on time or at all
 - Backpack is full of crumbled papers and random objects
 - Has difficulty breaking down long-term projects
 - Misses deadlines
 - Leaves everything to the last minute
- Disrupts home life with frantic searches, urgent requests for last minute help and anxiety fueled meltdowns
- They end up doing twice as much work and are exhausted

The Emotional Impact on Students

- Students are often told to try harder
- To stop being so lazy
- They may be trying as hard as they can
- The root of the problem may have nothing to do with their motivation to do well
- They must be responsible
- Lack of basic organization skills combined with heavier workloads, more academic stress, emotional turmoil and an overwhelming amount of electronic distractions compete for students' attention.
- Often manifests in missing and late assignments and deteriorating grades
- A sense of learned helplessness and hopelessness develops in the disorganized student over time
- When parents and teachers buy into the image of the hopelessly disorganized student, it reinforces the student's behavior and mindset that nothing can be done
- Something can be done. Solutions exist.
- Disorganization is not a character flaw
- Students need skills, support and scaffolding while the skills are being learned

A Quick Aside :The Messy Bedroom

- At home, bedrooms may appear chaotic—but being messy is different than being disorganized
- Look for and have them explain the underlying structure to their mess that allows them to function just fine...
- But, if they are exhibiting academic distress, then disorganization is likely contributing to the problem

Roots of Disorganization

Skills are lagging.

Some students are innately able to organize themselves Others can not.

Disorganized students have not yet internalized the structures set up in the classroom or home.

These students must be explicitly taught:

Organizational concepts

Methods behind the systems

Have ample opportunity to practice with support before they are expected to repeat the process independently

- Why do some students need more support?
- The answer lies in the frontal lobe of the brain which is home to the Executive Functions.

What Are Executive Function Skills?

Life skills necessary for success.

- **Organization**
- **Planning /Prioritizing**
- **Time Management**
- Working Memory
- Task initiation
- Response Inhibition
- Emotional regulation
- Metacognition
- Flexibility
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Sustained and directed attention
- Regulation of Processing Speed

Executive Functions (EF)

A Brief Overview

- EF Originate in the frontal region of the brain. **EF's are the brain's control center**
- EF working together account for the brain's ability to manage and organize for learning activities and behavior.
- These brain functions are **unrelated to intellectual ability**
- **EF's are a critical set of cognitive skills** that are strong predictors of academic success.
- **EF's are neuro-biologically based skills/abilities** that impact tasks requiring mental control and self-regulation
- Executive Functions begin developing in infancy and continue developing through the 20's
- Developmental delays impact academic success

Executive Functions and Organization

- Who is to blame? The fault doesn't lie with parents, teachers or with a child's willfulness.
- Disorganization is not a lazy child, or an uncaring teacher
- The brain's frontal lobes are to blame. The brain has not developed at the rate needed to keep pace with the demands placed on students
- Leading to difficulty mastering academic skills
- There are no hardwired parts of the brain for academic skills
- In simpler times slower brain development of EFs was okay
- Now we place many more executive demands on children **and** much sooner in a far more distracting world
- Some students do learn organization by observation and osmosis
- **The disorganized student needs skills explicitly taught**

How Weak Organizational Skills Can Impact School Success RED FLAGS

Weak organizational skills may present as clutter and disorganization, lost papers, etc.....

But, can also cause students to have:

Difficulty with the concept of cause and effect

Difficulty processing information

Transitioning smoothly at school and home

Behaving appropriately in social situations and the classroom

Difficulty planning and prioritizing for long-term projects

Difficulty organizing their thoughts in both words and writing

Difficulty perceiving potential consequences and inhibiting behavior accordingly

Difficulty sequencing, categorizing and prioritizing

Staying focused on a task

Manipulating information to answer questions posed in an unfamiliar manner

Holding onto new information while they are using it (working memory)

Making step by step plans for breaking projects down

Managing and figuring out the time needed to complete each step of the plan

Developing a concept of time—it may not be procrastination—it may be a poor concept of time

Difficulty using self-talk for planning which is needed for effective problem solving

They Are NOT Lazy, They are Disorganized

- Laziness and lack of motivation are not diagnoses or the root of the problem
- After years of difficulty with school and homework students may become beaten down and learn not to try anymore
- They need skills to get them unstuck
- Something as simple as following directions requires good mental organizational skills to focus and execute
- Learning to be organized is a process
- It is a skill that needs to be taught, practiced and honed
- It requires dedication, optimism and support
- Note- A 2008 study showed “ Of all the tools, keeping the binder organized in MS and HS was the most effective because it accomplishes such basic necessities for order: student’s have a definite place for HW, they could find returned assignments to review for tests, and they had paper to take notes on.”

How to Introduce the Topic of Organization

- **Three Rules for Success:**
- **Stay calm**
- **Listen to your child**
- **Stay positive**
- Broach the subject calmly outside of a heated moment. Inflamed frontal lobes can't think clearly. No yelling.
- Make a mutually agreeable appointment with your child to discuss the issue. Stick to it
- Bring up the topic in a non-accusatory, non-judgmental, empathetic, uncritical way
- Ask questions like: What isn't working for you? How can we work out a solution together? Involve your child in the process always
- Do not impose your will on your child's organizational systems. They must be developed with the child's input and consent if they are to work without pushback
- Children may at first be skeptical, angry or fearful that you will contact their teacher
- Or, if the teacher hasn't contacted you, they may be skating under the radar- just where they like it and not want you to contact the school
- However, give your child an opportunity to act independently and self advocate with the teacher before contacting them
- Remind your child of the benefits of being more organized
- Always give positive feedback

How to Help

- Use checklists- post HW assignments, chores and reminders in student's study space
- Organize HW assignments and project timelines, encourage prioritization
- Designate a study space where all materials are located (Student Toolkit)
- Set consistent study/HW times, modify flexibly
- Supervise organization of papers in notebooks, binders and on devices
- Schedule a weekly clean out of backpacks/ binders in the planner
- Prepare for the next day. Put all papers, books, HW, gym clothes, instruments etc. in the backpack. Choose clothes at night
- Encourage students to write everything down, make lists, take notes, leave reminders
- Make sure they are getting enough sleep and eating properly for optimal brain functioning

Benefits of Being Organized

- Remind children of the benefits of organization:
- Homework gets done faster
- Less yelling in the house
- Fewer punishments
- You won't be on their backs all the time
- More free time
- Less frustration
- Better grades

Actively Listen to Your Child and Stay Positive

- What makes sense to you may not work for them
- Learn what works for them by listening (if nothing else you will learn what doesn't work)
- If you want to preserve your relationship with your child and bring out their self-motivation keep it positive
- Punishments don't teach skills
- If you must punish: make them short, to the point and given without a nasty attitude. Stay calm
- Rewards and punishments may shut down performance by adding stress and anxiety
- Find something to praise- effective praise is specific
- You and your child are teammates, not adversaries

Supervising Developing Skills

- You can't teach skills once and expect them to perform the next time independently
- Skills need to be explicitly taught and practiced
- Why? Again it's the frontal lobes of the brain that are having trouble carrying out the plan
- Many kids know *what* to do. They just *can't* do it.
- That's where supervision is essential
- Disorganized kids can't be left to sink or swim because their brain needs the support of a life jacket
- Allowing failure does not teach skills

Four Basic Organizing Styles

- **Visual Organizers**
- Think of missing items in terms of where they last *saw* the item
- Need to have all items in view
- Have a hard time finding items they cannot see
- Respond well to color, pictures and visual cues
- Feel disorganized when their work area is visually overloaded

Spatial Organizers

- Think of missing items in terms of the place they last *used* them
- Need all supplies within reach when doing HW
- Need clear work spaces
- Need to “feel good” in the work area
- Generally like music, dance and drama
- Are sensitive to others feelings
- Feel disorganized in a messy work area

Chronological/Sequential Organizers

- Think of missing items in relation to the time they last *had* the item
- Access information chronologically
- Think with numbers
- Remember dates, times and order of events
- Looks at details
- May appear messy but there is an order to their piles
- Memorize best through repetition
- Feel frazzled when their work area is not in order

Visual/Spatial Organizers

- A combination of these two styles is frequently found in disorganized children
- These children are imaginative, sensitive to their feelings
- Have a poor sense of time

What Parents Can Do To Help

- Organization is a pre-requisite for student success
- Establish Daily Homework Routines/Schedules— use timers (prompts)
- Choose a Designated Homework Time-time, place, create list (DHTs—create structure and routine)
- Select a distraction free location
- Set up a HW Center- supplies should be located here
- Organize space to reduce distractions according to organizational style
- Supply Box -Pens, pencils, markers, scissors, paper, sharpener, glue, 3 hole punch, etc. (See the organized student's supply list handout)
- Select backpacks with limited pockets. More pockets mean more places to lose things. Make sure backpacks are large enough. Tight spaces are hard to find things in
- Develop time lines for long term assignments using calendar/planner
- Break projects down into chunks and impose interim due dates.
- Teach older students to use Google Calendar which can be shared with you and will send text message reminders to their phones
- Point of performance reminders- post its on exit doors, checklists for morning and evening routines that offer visual support.
- Siri is a great executive assistant

Planners

- A visual tool that creates a representation of a student's workload and schedule
- Planners are non-negotiable , but students should have the option to choose them
- Help students develop habits for successfully recording assignments- note that support may be required both in class and at home . It takes 21 days to create a habit. Be patient
- Elementary students can be paired with a reliable homework buddy to double check that they have what is needed for HW or studying
- Middle and HS students are expected to have internalized this skill
- When they haven't, make sure they have 2 reliable classmates info (friend lifeline) per class
- Record friends info, teacher email info, extra help days/room number in the front of the planner for each class
- If there is no HW, have the student write NO HW for that subject
- Encourage reviewing the plan for the day and looking ahead in the planner
- Anchor action to something the child always does to help develop the habit
- If the school planner isn't working, engage your child in deciding what type of planner will work (view online) Make sure there is plenty of space to write down assignments
- Remember that writing down assignments is not an easy task for disorganized students
- Putting a clip on the current page makes it easier to find
- Store the planner in the front of the backpack with intention. It will always be in the right place for access
- Coping with multiple teachers during MS and HS can be an organizational nightmare for students. Be sensitive. Be calm

Calendars

- **Use Calendars for short and long range planning because they allow a big picture view of the month**
- **Use a different color for each subject in the calendar**
- **Record all due dates, tests, quizzes, projects, midterms, SATs, sport practices and games, lessons, tutors, doctor/dentist, social plans, end of quarter dates, AP exam dates, final and regents dates/times**
- **Use RED only for tests, quizzes and other important due dates**
- **Create Daily “To Do” Lists - What do I have to do? How long will this take? How will I prioritize these tasks**
- **Develop time lines for long term assignments using calendar/planners**
- **Schedule backwards**
- **Practice time estimation**
- **Break large tasks into chunks and mark on calendar to make the work less intimidating**
- **Monitor the students ability to execute the plan and maintain accountability to the plan**
- **Live your life out loud. Talk to your children about your upcoming plans, calendar entries, conflicts in schedules, planning the days events, cooking, packing**

Getting the Work Done

- Starts with getting the correct assignments and materials home
- Continues with the child planning and doing the work
- Ends with the work being returned to the correct HW Folder
- **Why is this so difficult?**
- The ability to set long terms goals and break them down into short term goals is challenging for disorganized children
- Their poor concept of time leads them to believe they have enough time
- Lack of foresight prevents them from seeing the disadvantages of delaying the project
- Lack of hindsight prevents them from remembering that procrastination didn't work last time
- Disorganized children often have extreme difficulty with initiating and executing a task to completion
- Some are overwhelmed by having to do a project at all, so they put it off
- Sometimes they simply forget they have a project
- They have difficulty resisting the temptation to do something more fun
- These problems are the direct result of an undeveloped brain, not the fault of the child
- Breaking projects down into a series of simple steps allows students to feel less overwhelmed and they are less likely to melt or shut down

Getting the Work Back to School

- A routine must be established at home for returning assignments to school.
- Elementary students should have a take-home folder and a return to school folder. Check and empty with your child nightly
- MS and HS -The binder system. Disorganized students often are better off with one or two binders. AM/PM –if they are resistant use smaller binders , 1 per subject, color coded
- Students should label all papers with the date and CW (classwork) or HW
- All handouts, assignments and exams from current units should be in the binder
- Homework pockets should be clearly labelled and checked against the planner for return to school nightly
- 3 hole punch papers and file by subject nightly- in an ideal world (weekly in the real one)
- Create lists with your child for HW routines and post in HW area
- Establish a launching pad by the exit door
- Weekly backpack/binder clean sweep
- Point of performance reminders –leave the things they need in view to prevent OOSOOM
- Brain breaks boost performance. Organizing is stressful for the disorganized student
- Disorganized students live in fear of being caught without the one thing they need, so their solution may be to carry everything

At Home Filing System

- Everything needs a home
- Students need to find things quickly in the classroom
- Date every paper to save time and energy
- Help your child create a filing system so they will be invested in its success
- Remind them: when midterms and finals approach they can spend time studying, not hunting and gathering
- Be positive. Allow your child to meet with success along the way to encourage sticking with the system
- First teach sorting by subject
- Then model sorting chronologically (dates are the key)
- At the end of every unit, papers should usually be filed
- Label each unit by quarter and name, staple, paper or binder clip
- File in subject file either chronologically or in reverse (newest first)
- Schedule filing time in HW planner

Organizing Computer Files

- Teach your child to create a folder labeled with child's name, grade and school year
- Within this folder create additional folders for each subject
- Within each subject folder create additional folders for each unit, subdivided into three folders- Class Notes, Homework, Projects
- Create a separate folder for each long term assignment and file all drafts in one folder
- Remember that support and non-judgmental supervision is needed while students develop skills

Organization of Backpacks and Lockers

- An organized backpack translates into an organized brain
- Some are embarrassed by the mess, but will accept help
- Others are reluctant to do things differently (cognitive flexibility)
- Others may not see the value of organizing papers (teachers do!)
- The more involved the child is in creating the system, the more likely they will use it
- Make a list of supplies needed (planning)
- Bring your child with you to the store
- Kids love new school supplies, let them choose
- Purchase a locker shelf (or two) to prevent the locker black hole
- Other organizing accessories are available online
- Store textbooks on locker shelves by AM/PM or whatever makes sense to the child
- Let them make decisions and choices about their space
- Post a checklist inside the locker to serve as a visual reminder and reduce forgetting
- Let them know you don't expect backpack/locker to stay that way Systems need to be maintained

Take-aways

- Kids do well if they can
- They must be response-able to develop skills
- All kids start out wanting to do well
- Students who are disorganized tend to be less successful in school (and life)

Teachers, parents and students must collaborate to develop underdeveloped skills- what works for you may not work for them!

Be supportive, positive, non-judgmental, uncritical and kind. Underneath that disorganized mess lives a child who needs our love, skills and support.

THANKS FOR JOINING ME TONIGHT!

How to reach me...

- Email-marj@ptscoaching.com
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- Questions and comments are always welcome!