

Start the School

SUMMER IS GREAT—NO SCHEDULE, FEWER DEMANDS, AND NO HOMEWORK! When August arrives, however, it is time to start thinking about putting some systems in place to ensure a successful school year for your child. Effectively communicating your child's needs to his or her teachers and setting up a home environment that facilitates homework completion can help get the new school year off to a good start.

One question to address is “How do I get pertinent information to the teacher or teachers who are working with my child?” A letter to your child's teacher can be a good start and a great vehicle to give the teacher an opportunity to become aware of your child's special education plan. If no formalized plan is in place and the teacher needs to know more about your child, then the same could apply.

Never assume that just because a formalized plan has been created that your child's teachers have been informed about its contents. Remember, it only takes a week to get behind in school, and then the stress for you and your child to play catch-up never seems to end. If the special education department within your district has a system in place for getting the details of your child's plan to the teacher, then collaborate with them to convey your child's information to the teacher.

Write a letter to your child's teacher

Does your child have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Accommodation Plan for school? Does your child require special classroom interventions? Has your child's teacher (or teachers) been made aware of the plan? If you answered yes to the first two questions, and no to the last question, then take out your pen now and write a letter.

The purpose of the letter to your child's teachers is to make them aware that your child has an educational program. Teachers may not have received those records from the school administration yet, and you want to make sure the information has been conveyed to them. The letter needs to be written in the spirit of providing support to the teacher, while making sure the records regarding your child have been made available.

Two sidebars are included with this article to assist you in writing the letter to your child's teachers. One sidebar lists important points to address, as well as other items that can be included, based on your child's individual needs. The second sidebar provides a sample letter to help you get started.

End the letter by saying that you look forward to meeting the teacher(s) on back-to-



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Year Right

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school night, then be sure to attend! If your child's school does not hold such an event, say that you would like to meet them before the parent-teacher conferences at the end of the grading period, and ask what day and time would be convenient. Send the letter to all your child's teachers—including physical education teachers and coaches—and be sure to share a copy with the school principal.

The home environment

Now, let's talk about setting up the home environment to effectively organize and plan out those "dreaded by parents and kids" homework sessions. Because many children with AD/HD have problems with organizational impairment due to executive functioning deficits, the following proactive strategies can take some of the stress out of the homework process. Organize a space in your

Important Points to Address in Your Letter

- › Your name and relationship to (child's name)
- › Your contact information
 - phone numbers
 - fax number
 - mailing address
 - email address
 - best times to reach you
- › Your aim to work as partners to ensure a successful year (for teacher and child)
 - establish positive, open communication between home and school
 - offer cooperation, collaboration, assistance, support
 - provide helpful information about your child
- › Information about your child's disability and educational program (IEP or 504 Plan)
 - instructional needs, modifications, and/or accommodations in the plan
 - behavioral needs, modifications, and/or accommodations in the plan
- › System for home-school communication
 - daily homework and assignment sheet
 - daily/weekly behavior report
 - progress report, problem-solving, as needed

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Sample Letter to Your Child's Teacher

Date _____

Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs. _____,

My husband and I are writing this letter to introduce ourselves and to open a door of communication. We are the parents of [child's name], who will be a student in your class this year. We are looking forward to a successful school year for both you and [child's name], and as parents, we want to work with you and the school as partners in [child's name]'s education. We will be happy to help you and [child's name] in any way we can.

In case you have not had the opportunity to receive the records from special education, [child's name] has an educational program [insert IEP / 504 Plan as appropriate] to address needs related to attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), which affects [insert appropriate information here; for example: his/her ability to sit still, pay attention, and control his/her behavior. He/she has particular trouble getting organized, staying focused, completing and turning in assignments on time, and memorizing information, such as math facts.] We want to take this opportunity to share information about his/her educational services in a simplified format, including the modifications and accommodations he/she receives.

Listed here are the main provisions of his/her [insert IEP / 504 Plan and list specifics below]:

- Preferential seating
- Extra time on tests (time and a half)
- Test answers recorded in an alternate manner, as needed—especially for short-answer and discussion items (oral, audiotaped, dictated, or typed responses)
- Second set of books at home
- Use of a calculator for math
- Shortened homework assignments for math and writing
- Homework, long-range assignments, and tests recorded in planner, signed by teacher, and sent home every day
- Resource room, 45 minutes 4 times per week for math
- Foreign language exemption
- Home-school reward system for homework completion and turning in assignments on time

We would also like to take this opportunity to set up a system of communication between home and school. You may already have such a system for your class that we will be happy to adapt and use. If not, then we will send a planner to school with [child's name] everyday. It will always be in his/her backpack. He/she is to use it to write down his daily homework assignments, as well as any long-range assignments, such as upcoming tests, so that we can help to monitor his/her schoolwork at home. I will also use the planner to communicate with you on a weekly basis. Would you please assist us by reviewing and signing his/her planner before he/she leaves school each day and sending a note home in the planner on Fridays, so that we can help [child's name] come to school prepared and reward him/her for his/her weekly school progress?

We would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to read our letter and helping with this important program. Having a system of support in place at the beginning of school will help to get the year off to a good start. My husband and I look forward to meeting you on back-to-school night, [insert date if known].

Please do not hesitate to contact us about problems or call on us for assistance at any time. We have included our phone and fax numbers and email addresses below.

Best regards,
[signature]

Parent(s) Full Name(s)

Street Address

Town, State, Zip Code

Home Phone, Cell phone, Fax number

Mother's email, Father's email

CC: Principal, Resource Room Teacher, Music Teacher,
Art Teacher, Coach [all that apply]

home for doing homework. Choose an area that is away from distractions and has ample room. Depending on their age, some children do better working independently in a quiet place that is away from other family members and distractions. Younger children often need to be in an area close enough to mom or dad so that progress on homework can be monitored.

A large calendar on the wall can be helpful for keeping track of your child's assignments, when they are due, and when your child will be working on parts of long-term assignments. It can also be beneficial to include the dates of other activities such as soccer games, piano lessons, and so forth. This will help you and your child see the big picture of what needs to be done each week. Post-It Notes and a bulletin board to put them on can also be helpful organization tools for older children.

Make sure all supplies for doing homework are organized and accessible close to the homework area. It can be helpful for the supplies to be sorted in containers or bins or placed in a regular spot on a shelf. Items that students often need to complete homework



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assignments can include paper, pencils, pens, colored pencils, crayons, erasers, magic markers, a ruler, a calculator, a stapler and staples, scissors, glue sticks and report folders. Different kinds of paper, such as lined, graph, computer, and construction paper are important to keep in your designated homework area. And for those moments when your child announces at 9 PM that he just remembered he has a project due for his science class tomorrow, it is wise to keep a supply of poster paper and maybe even project board on hand.

An essential tool to have in the homework area is a timer that can be set to break the homework session into manageable units for the child with AD/HD. Setting the timer for fifteen minutes of on-task work followed by a five-minute break can give the fidgety or frustrated child an opportunity to get up, move about, and then refocus on the work.

Repeat this process for as long as is necessary to complete the evening's homework.

Time limits will vary depending on the age of the child, his/her ability to stay on task, and the child's difficulty with

What is Parent to Parent (P2P)?

PARENT TO PARENT: FAMILY TRAINING ON AD/HD was developed by Linda Smith, Beth Kaplanek, and Mary Durham to provide educational information and support for individuals and families dealing with AD/HD and learning to navigate its challenges across the lifespan. Courses are offered in local communities across the country. The highly structured curriculum was developed by parents who have lived the experience but have also had access to the best researchers and practitioners. The course is usually offered as a seven-week class that meets for two hours once a week. Participants receive extensive supporting materials, including articles, reference materials, handouts, and homework assignments.

To find a Parent to Parent (P2P) program near you, go to www.chadd.org/parent2parent. There you will learn whether there is a certified instructor in your local community. If not, CHADD has an online P2P class running several times per year; learn more about the online program at www.chadd.org/P2PTraining.






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and/or interest in the assignment. The timer can also be a tool for teaching the child time-management strategies. Parents can make the child aware of the importance of using strategies, such as the timer, when they model using the timer to break homework completion into manageable parts.

Another helpful proactive strategy is to prepare a notebook for all of the handouts your child's teacher will send home. This notebook will be for you. It is hard to remember classroom policies, course outlines, and grading scales for all teachers. Create a section in a three-ring binder for each of your children, using notebook dividers with pockets. When your child (or children) brings home correspondence during the school year, you will have a place to keep it. When you need to refer to the information, you will know right where to find it.

Schoolwork and the stress that it brings can be difficult for families dealing with AD/HD. Writing a letter to your child's teachers and setting up your home environment so that you are ready to meet the challenges of homework completion can help your child and family get off to a good start in the coming school year. 

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Educators Day at Conference

CHADD IS PLEASED TO AGAIN HOST THE ONE-DAY EDUCATORS TRAINING ON AD/HD

during its annual international conference, to be held in Anaheim, California, this November. The training will take place on Saturday, November 15, 2008, and will feature sessions that address the needs of educators who want to help students affected by AD/HD to succeed. Additional track sessions for educators will be conducted on Friday, November 14.

Geared toward teachers, administrators, school psychologists, counselors, nurses and other who work with students and young people in the field of education, the Educators Day is filled with sessions that address positive behavioral supports, classroom behavior management, family and school success, instructional handouts, and evidence-based strategies to effectively teach students coping with AD/HD.

Educators Day was a dramatic hit among last year's conference attendees. Its sessions, specifically dedicated to the needs of education professionals, supplemented sessions offered throughout the conference that addressed the needs of children and young people affected by AD/HD in an educational setting. Education professionals filled the sessions to room capacity, and requested that we host the day again during this year's conference.

Visit www.chadd.org to register for this year's Educators Day.

