INSTILLING WANAGEMENT

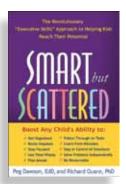




By Peg Dawson, EdD, and Richard Guare, PhD

TIME MANAGEMENT IS THE CAPACITY TO ESTIMATE HOW MUCH TIME ONE HAS,

how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important. You probably know some adults who are great at time management and some who aren't. Adults for whom this is a strength are on time for obligations, can estimate how long it takes to do something, and can pace their work depending on the time available (speeding up as needed). They tend not to overextend themselves, in part because they have a realistic sense of what they can accomplish. Adults who are weak at time management have difficulty sticking to a schedule, chronically "run late," and miscalculate when determining how long it takes to do anything. If you have these problems, see the suggestions in Chapter 3, "How Your Own Executive Skill Strengths and Weaknesses Matter," for helping your child with a shared weakness.



From SMART
but SCATTERED:
The Revolutionary
"Executive Skills"
Approach to Helping
Kids Reach
Their Potential,
by Peg Dawson, EdD,
and Richard Guare, PhD,
New York:
The Guilford Press,
2009. Reprinted with
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How Time Management Develops

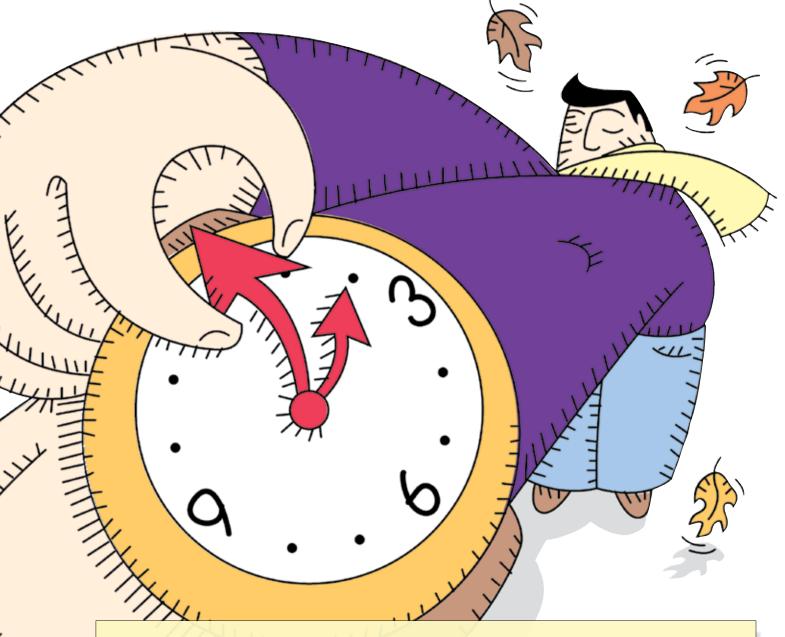
Because we know young children can't manage time, we do it for them. We prompt them to get ready for school or daycare, for example, allowing what we think will be enough time to complete the tasks at hand. Or we let them know what time they need to start getting ready for bed in order to have enough time to read a story after they've put on their pajamas, brushed their teeth, and washed up. If a special event is planned, we estimate how long it will take to get ready and cue children to do what they need to do so the family is ready on time. We notice that children work at different speeds, and we adjust our plans and prompts accordingly.

Gradually we give over the responsibility for this to our children. Once they've learned to tell time (somewhere around second grade), we can remind them to check the clock as they become more autonomous. When the day has predictable events built in, such as sports practice or favorite TV shows, we help children plan their time around those events. When we insist that children finish their homework or chores before going to

a sports practice or before watching a television program, we're helping them learn to plan their time.

Sometimes kids hit a snag around middle school because the demands on their time increase just as we tend to cut back on monitoring and supervision. And the number of obligations increases right as the number of distracting activities also increases. How can you fit in homework when you want to play video games, IM, surf favorite websites, listen to newly discovered music, chat on cell phones with friends, and watch favorite TV shows? No wonder today's young people attempt to multitask! For some, the temptations are just too great, in which case we have to step back in and help them manage their time more effectively.

By high school, many young people have become more adept at juggling options and obligations and planning their time more effectively. If your children have not achieved this, it may be a cause for increasing friction between parents and teenagers because they are at an age where they resist direction and directives from parents. TERESANNE / ISTOCK, BONOTOM STUDIO



HOW GOOD ARE YOUR CHILD'S TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS?

Use the following scale to rate how well your child performs each of the tasks listed. At each level, children can be expected to perform all the tasks listed fairly well to very well.

SCALE

- 0—Never or rarely
- 1—Does but not well (about 25% of the time)
- 2—Does fairly well (about 75% of the time)
- 3—Does very well (always or almost always)

PRESCHOOL/KINDERGARTEN

- ____ Can complete daily routines without dawdling (with some cues/reminders)
- ____ Can speed up and finish something more quickly when given a reason to do so
- Can finish a small chore within time limits (e.g., pick up toys before turning on the TV)

LOWER ELEMENTARY (GRADES 1-3)

- ____ Can complete a short task within time limits set by an adult
- ____ Can build in an appropriate amount of time to complete a chore before a deadline (may need assistance)
- ____ Can complete a morning routine within time limits (may need practice)

UPPER ELEMENTARY (GRADES 4-5)

- ____ Can complete daily routines within reasonable time limits without assistance
- ____ Can adjust a homework schedule to allow for other activities (e.g., starting early if there's an evening Scout meeting)
- ____ Can start long-term projects far enough in advance to reduce any time crunch (may need help with this)

MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 6-8)

- ____ Can usually finish homework before bedtime
- Can make good decisions about priorities when time is limited (e.g., coming home after school to finish a project rather than playing with friends)
- ____ Can spread out a long-term project over several days



Instilling Time Management in Everyday Situations

Without going overboard, maintain a predictable daily routine in your family. When children get up and go to bed at around the same time every day, and meals occur on a fairly set schedule, they grow up with a sense of time being an orderly progression from one event to another. This makes it easier for them to plan their time in between scheduled events (such as meals and bedtime).

Talk to your children about how long it takes to do things, such as chores, picking up their rooms, or completing a homework assignment. This is the beginning of developing time estimation skills—a critical component of time management.

Plan an activity for a weekend or vacation day that involves several steps. When you work with your child on planning skills, you're also working on time management because planning involves developing timelines for task completion. By talking with your child about "the plan for the day" and discussing how long it will take to complete the activity, your child is learning about time and the relationship between time and tasks. Doing this type of planning can actually be fun if you choose a fun activity, like spending the day with a friend. Ask the child to figure out how long it should take to have lunch, go to the park or beach, stop for ice cream on the way home, and so forth. The lessons learned will be especially meaningful to your child if he realizes that he and his friend got to pack the day with everything they wanted to do only because they blocked out their time in advance.

Use calendars and schedules yourself and encourage your child to do the same. Some families post a large calendar in a central location where individual and family activities are posted. This has the effect of making time visible to your child.

Purchase a commercially available clock, available from Time Timers (*www. timetimers.org*), that can be set to show visually how much time a child has left to work. Also described in Chapter 13, this device can be purchased in clock or wristwatch form or as computer software.

Out of the House on Time: Managing Morning Routines

Seven-year-old Garret is the youngest in a family of four boys and has always desperately wanted to keep up with his older brothers. He wants to be independent, and when he was younger his favorite line was "I do it myself." Garret seems to understand the concept of time. He can tell time to the quarter hour and has a pretty fair idea of when his favorite shows are on TV. However, he often seems to lose track of time, and he has little sense of time urgency. This has led to problems at home and at school. At home, getting ready to go anywhere can be a major chore. Although the situation can be worse if the destination is a place that Garret doesn't

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STEP 1: Establish Behavioral Goal

Target executive skill(s): Time management

Specific behavioral objective: Garret will complete his morning routine tasks within a specific amount of time.

STEP 2: Design Intervention

What environmental supports will be provided to help reach the target goal?

- > Picture/written schedule with removable pictures
- > Timer
- > Cues from parents two times during the schedule
- > Teacher support of the plan if he is late for school

What specific skill will be taught, who will teach the skill, and what procedure will be used to teach it?

Skill: Time management

Who will teach the skill? Parents/teacher

Procedure

- Garret and his parents make up a visual/written schedule.
- > Garret arranges activities in his preferred order.
- > Parents set a timer in the morning.
- > Parents check with Garret twice during his schedule.
- > Garret removes a picture as each activity is completed.
- Garret chooses from the prize box if he gets through his schedule within the agreed-on time.
- If Garret is late for school, he makes up missed work during free time.

What incentives will be used to help motivate the child to use/practice the skill?

Garret can choose an inexpensive treat from the prize box if he completes tasks on time.

Keys to Success

• Keep a rough count of the number of cues you provide and how close you need to be (in the doorway vs. at the bottom of the stairs, for example) to make your reminders effective. Twice during the schedule may prove not to be enough. You may need to issue more reminders to get your child used to getting the assigned tasks done during the allotted time. Although it can be somewhat annoying to keep this kind of record, it will allow you to see progress and appreciate the pace needed to wean your child from these supports. Without having this sense of progress, parents often feel the system isn't working and go back to nagging.

want to go (for example, a doctor's appointment), he is slow getting ready even for preferred activities (for example, going to a water park). To get or keep him moving his parents or one of his siblings routinely cue or nag him. While this usually works eventually, it's a source of growing frustration for family members. Garret doesn't struggle academically or exhibit any learning problems, but he's often the last to finish his work. His teacher has noticed that he can be more efficient when he needs to finish a task to get to a preferred activity such as recess.

His parents decide that Garret is old enough to begin to learn some basic skills in time management. They reason that if Garret is to learn how to finish tasks within a certain amount of time, he first needs to know what tasks are expected of him. Because leaving the house has been the issue, they decide to concentrate on the tasks he might need to complete to leave the house. This could range from the full-blown morning routine (wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast, brush teeth, etc.) to something as simple as getting his shoes on. Because the morning routine includes most of the "getting ready" tasks and he is slow in the morning, they decide to begin with this.

To take advantage of Garret's desire to be a "big boy" and be independent, they talk with him about a schedule of jobs in the morning. They try to sell the plan by telling him that if he can do his jobs on



time, they won't have to nag him. Garret isn't particularly interested until they tell him he can earn prizes with this plan. He has fun making up the schedule, which consists of pictures and words, because he gets to "act" each scene (getting up, eating breakfast, brushing his teeth, etc.). His parents basically let him decide the order of the tasks on the schedule. They create a Velcro strip so that the order of the pictures can be changed and they can be removed. The plan is that as each job is finished, Garret will move that picture and put it in the "done" pocket attached to the bottom of the schedule. Rather than giving him a set time to begin with, over two mornings they agree that they will time him and use the result to decide how long he needs to finish. They make up a prize box with inexpensive little toys and treats (like gum) and put a picture of this at the end of the schedule. To increase his chances of success, his parents agree that for the first week or two they will check with him twice during the schedule as a reminder. His parents, after clearing it with the school, also insist that if he is slow in getting through his schedule and late for school as a result, he will make up the time either during recess or after school.

Using this system, Garret becomes more efficient and independent in the morning. For other "getting ready" times, his parents use a miniversion of this plan involving one or two pictures, the timer, and points that can be earned.

Time Warp: Learning to Estimate How Long a Task Will Take

Nathan's parents have always appreciated the eighth grader's mellow nature, which contrasts so sharply with his sister, who panics every time she has a test to study for. But ever since he entered middle school, his parents have become increasingly concerned about his tendency to put off homework until too close to bedtime, which means he rushes through it or may not finish it all. Problems are compounded when he has long-term projects because he often leaves them until the day before they are due. Over time, his mother has realized that part of the problem is that Nathan has no idea how long things take to do. A paper he thinks he can write in half an hour may take him two hours, and a project he thinks he can put together in a couple of hours may take five or six. His parents have tried repeatedly to get Nathan to understand that his ability to estimate time is weak, but even when he acknowledges the fact that the last time he wrote a paper it took him two hours, this time, because he knows what he wants to write about and has a rough outline in his head, he's sure he can whip it out in an hour max.

After one too many arguments when his parents pointed out yet again that he was no judge of time and Nathan told them in no uncertain terms to "Get off my case!" his parents decided they had to figure out another way to handle the problem. They took Nathan out to dinner on a Saturday night when he wasn't doing anything with friends and proposed that each day when he got home from school he make a list of the homework assignments he had to do

that night and estimate how long each assignment would take. He would then decide at what time he was going to start his homework based on his estimates, with the understanding that he would be done by no later than 9:00. If he was off by more than twenty minutes, then the next day he would start his homework at

4:30. If his estimates were accurate, then he could determine what time he would start his homework the next day. They also agreed he had to build in time to study for tests and to do a little work on long-term projects at least two to three nights a week unless his daily homework took more than two hours. Nathan agreed to this plan because he thought it would give him a chance to prove his parents wrong—he even spent an hour on the computer when he got home, happily creating a spreadsheet he could use to keep his data. He told his mom he would email the spreadsheet to her as soon as he filled out his daily plan. They agreed that she would check the plan and would check in with him at the time he said he would be done with his homework, at which point he would show her all the assignments he had completed.

For the first couple of weeks his mom needed to remind Nathan to make the plan and email it to her. Nathan quickly learned that he wasn't as good at estimating as he thought he was. But because he hated starting his homework so soon after he got home from school, he gradually improved his ability to estimate how long homework would take. A couple of times, when he showed his parents his work, they saw that he'd done a rather sloppy job, apparently in an effort to get it done on time. They talked about introducing a penalty for sloppiness, and with a warning that this would happen if sloppiness became an issue, Nathan cleaned up his act—at least enough so his parents decided not to push the issue. •

STEP 1: Establish Behavioral Goal

Target executive skill(s): Time management

Specific behavioral objective: Nathan will learn to accurately estimate the time needed to complete homework by a specific time each night.

STEP 2: Design Intervention

What environmental supports will be provided to help reach the target goal?

- > Start and stop times for homework
- Spreadsheet for estimated work times
- > Check-ins with mother

What specific skill will be taught, who will teach the skill, and what procedure will be used to teach it?

Skill: Time management

Who will teach the skill? Parents/Nathan

- > Nathan will make a list of homework assignments and the estimated time needed to complete them, put this on a spreadsheet, and send it to his mother.
- > Based on these estimates, he will decide what time to begin homework.
- > Work will be completed by 9:00 PM, and if his estimate is off by 20+ minutes, he will start work earlier the next day.
- Nathan will build in time to study for tests and will commit to work on long-term projects two to three nights per week.

What incentives will be used to help motivate the child to use/practice the skill?

Nathan can manage his own time without interference or nagging from parents.

Keys to Success

- Vigilance from you is critical in the early stages of the intervention because most kids will find some elements of the plan require a lot of effort and will therefore forget or avoid them.
- Have the child's teachers independently verify the amount and quality of work completed by the child. As designed, this plan requires accurate reports from the child. In our experience, the most effective way to prevent breakdown of the plan is to have the teachers offer feedback, probably by email. Reports should come to you, with a copy to your child.

