

disorganization

the problem:

The child forgets to bring the right books and supplies home or to school. His desk, locker, backpack, and notebook are in disarray. He forgets deadlines and scheduled activities.

the reason:

The neurological process that keeps us organized is called “executive function.” This is the ability to organize, prioritize, and analyze in order to make reasonable decisions and plans. Children with AD/HD and related neurobiological problems have impaired executive function skills due to abnormal dopamine levels in the frontal lobe of the brain.

the obstacles:

Punishment will not change disorganized behaviors that are related to brain pathology. It’s confusing to teachers and parents when students with AD/HD are inconsistent in their ability to organize. Such children are sometimes labeled “sloppy” or “lazy.” If a child handles one task in an organized way, it is tempting to believe he could always be organized “if he wanted to.”

SOLUTIONS

IN THE CLASSROOM:

Children who take medication for AD/HD may show some improvement in their ability to stay organized; however, they still need teachers and parents to provide support and teach compensatory skills. The key to helping kids stay organized is constant communication among teachers and parents.

- + If possible, provide the student with two sets of books and supplies—one for home and one for school—so that there is little to have to remember. This helps conserve the mental energy the child needs for his most important task: learning.
- + Provide a special assignment notebook with larger-than-usual spaces in which to write. If the child tends to cram and stuff papers in his folders, a binder with pocket-type inserts in which to stuff papers may work better than the standard three-ring

binder with tabbed sections.

- + Give assignments in writing, or check what the child has written himself, to ensure accuracy.
- + Color-code books and supplies by subject. For example, use yellow for all geography book covers, notebook dividers, and files. Use red for everything related to history class, and so on.

AT HOME: Organizational skills rarely come naturally. Spend some time with your child teaching the basics of planning and organization.

- + Double-check your child’s assignment notebooks to make sure that homework is in its proper place once completed.
- + Make multiple copies of permission slips, event announcements, and other paperwork to post in several areas of the house. These will serve as visual reminders of important dates and deadlines.

- + Keep a triple-hole puncher on your child’s desk to make sure that important papers can be easily punched and inserted into his school binder.
- + Check belongings daily and organize weekly by cleaning out and reordering backpacks, assignment notebooks, and work binders.
- + Set up a color-coded file system, with colors matching the system devised for school, on your child’s desk. He then can easily store papers that don’t need to be toted around every day.
- + Provide a place for everything: a box for school supplies, a holder for CDs, a shelf for books, a bulletin board for announcements, an under-bed box for old artwork and papers.

If your child rejects your efforts to help him stay organized, impose logical consequences. If he loses a CD, for example, you don’t have to replace it.