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Study Skills for Elementary School Children with ADHD

These smart study skills can help your child with ADD ADHD pump up his test scores and make the grade at school.

by Karen Sunderhaft

Parents and the media have been talking a lot about the “fourth-grade slump” — a declining interest in reading and academic achievement that can happen anytime between the second and fifth grades.

I taught fourth grade for more than a decade, and I know that the slump is real. Most educators believe it may be due to all the testing kids undergo during these grades, not to mention the emphasis on getting outstanding results.

For children with attention deficit disorder (ADD ADHD), however, it may also reflect the sudden increase in academic demands. In the early elementary grades, students are learning how to read. But in third grade, the focus switches to reading for meaning, interpreting information and synthesizing it with past lessons.

Students who barely got through those early grades are likely to hit a wall in fourth grade. This is when many children are diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia, or another learning disability. While ADHD can set up a student for a slump, there are many things a parent can do to support her child through this demanding stage. Here's how you can keep your child's test scores — and her interest in learning — high.

Before the Test

Break down the material. Children with ADHD have difficulty breaking projects into manageable “chunks.” This is why studying for a major test becomes an insurmountable task. Sit down with your child and a calendar and divide up the material he must master. Have him study one part for 15 minutes every night.

Find your child's peak study time. Some kids need to keep their focus going to get their work done before dinner, delaying the reward of relaxation. Other kids benefit from a break after school.

Change the view. Find the study environment that “clicks” with your child. Some kids like to work in their room in complete silence. Try having your child read in a rocking chair—the constant motion may help ADD kids concentrate. Or enlist a neighbor or family member who lives nearby to become your child's “study partner.”

Practice makes perfect. Alleviate anxiety by setting up practice tests that are timed, just as they are in school. Try the TimeTimer (timetimer.com)—a red “pie slice” on the clock's face diminishes as time ticks away, letting kids see just how much time they have left. After practicing at home, ask the teacher if she'd let your child use a timer in a real testing situation. It's silent, so it won't disturb his classmates.

Prepare body and mind. People still believe the myth that caffeine will improve your focus. Even though it temporarily increases alertness, your body soon crashes and you become more tired. Instead of letting your child drink a caffeinated soda, have him drink water—it acts as a lubricant for synapses in your brain—and get a good night's sleep before a test.

During the Test

In addition to teaching the following test-taking strategies, plan to do something fun after a day of testing. Having something to look forward to will help your child make it through.

Keep a steady pace. As she practiced at home, encourage your child to work at an even pace. Advise her to go with her first choice if she gets stuck on a question—usually this will be the right answer. If she still doubts her answer, she can put a dot next to the question and review the dotted questions at the end of the test.

Put everything in writing. Get your child in the habit of writing out math problems, rather than doing them in her head, to avoid careless errors. Make sure the teacher provides plenty of scrap paper during tests.

Teach him to be a STAR. Explain to your child that, when he's anxious or worried, his heart starts to beat faster and his anxiety level rises. When people are anxious, the brain's frontal lobes close down. This is the area of the brain that helps us make decisions—and it is definitely needed during a test! So teach your child to **Stop**, **Take A** breath, and **Relax** while testing.

Encourage positive thinking. It sounds corny, but it is true. Numerous studies prove that, when kids tell themselves that they are going to do well, it's more likely to happen. The reverse happens, too. So remind your child of his strengths and talents, and of your belief that he'll do well.



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