

8 Simple Ways Parents Can Teach Kids to Get Organized

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Kids with ADHD and other learning difficulties typically have trouble getting organized, managing their time and making the transition to living independently. They need specific training on how to manage those skills, which are crucial for college and beyond.

But, to varying degrees, nearly all young people have trouble with these issues.

As a specialist on prepping kids with learning disabilities for college, I often hear from parents that the strategies I teach really apply to all students.

So here are eight things all parents can do (or stop doing) to help their kids manage their time better, get organized and live without mom and dad doing everything.

Establish household routines. Choose a day of the week for household tasks like doing laundry, paying bills, and cleaning, and get your kids involved! If she knows that the clothes get washed on Thursday, your fashion plate can plan her ensembles accordingly. Engage your kids in setting the routine (it helps build their planning skills) and encourage them to follow yours or make their own when they get to college to keep chores manageable and stress low.

Help them learn how to use “free” time. Time management involves important skills -including planning, prioritizing and time estimation – which are crucial at college, where students’ only obligation is to be in class 12-15 hours a week. It’s counterintuitive, but having so much free time actually makes it hard for college students to use time well.

Have your kids create their own schedule for studying, chores and activities and try following it for a week. Then sit down together and review their results, being sure to discuss whether they over- or under-estimated how much time they needed for tasks (they need awareness of their time estimation abilities).

Adjust the schedule according to what they report, and try the new schedule for a week, with a check-in at the end. Do this each week until they have a schedule that works, then have them stick to it. If time management is a weakness for you, make your own schedule and, at those weekly sit-downs, let the kids help you evaluate how well you did.

Help them set interim deadlines for long-term papers or projects. Do you have that kid who constantly has to do an all-nighter because he started today on a paper due tomorrow, even though it was assigned three weeks ago? You’re not alone.

When your student is assigned a paper or project, sit down together and get the due date on the calendar. Then count backwards from the due date and pick a mid-point between now and the due date; this is the date for the rough draft to be completed. Then count a few days back from that point to pick a date to start any research that needs to be done, and a date to start the rough draft.

Does he want teacher feedback on the rough draft? Schedule that, too.

Teach them to use a wall calendar and an electronic calendar. Speaking of long-term projects and time management, the wall calendar is crucial for keeping upcoming deadlines visible so that they don't pass unnoticed (and for counting days until they arrive – mark off days of the month as they pass).

The electronic calendar allows them to make appointments when they are out and about. Pick two or three nights a week to “synch” these by copying dates from one to the other, and vice versa (make this part of that routine you're going to establish). You can enter weekly chores in there, too, to keep those from being forgotten.

Don't wake them up for school....and don't call them in late or drive them to school if they miss the bus. There are some [interesting](#) alarm clocks on the market that can move across the room, out of the reach of snooze button abusers. No one in the dorm is going to do this for your kids, and no matter what their friends currently at college tell them, professors know who makes it to class and who doesn't. And they do care.

Put them in charge of adult functions. By senior year of high school, kids should be making their own appointments, arranging transportation, completing forms at the doctor's office, and so on, so that they are aware of the steps involved. They will be doing these things on their own at college, so make sure they are comfortable doing them before they leave.

Don't run interference for your kids. At many colleges, professors don't take phone calls from parents, so help your kids develop their adult communication skills. If your kids have a problem with a teacher or a coach, teach them the right way to deal with authority figures. You can help them to compose an email, or practice what they want to say if they are going to speak directly to someone.

Cut tutoring unless you're using it exclusively to help students with a difficult subject. If your kid is really struggling with a particular class, some tutoring is appropriate to help her understand the content. But some well-intentioned parents have their kids tutored every day to help them earn the highest grades possible in service of getting into the most-selective schools.

This leaves kids no need to structure their own study time or decide what to focus on—skills they'll need at college. It also leaves them with no sense of what they can do without so much assistance, which at college may be limited to one tutoring session a week by another undergraduate. Make sure the tutor teaches your kids strategies they can use on their own, and then cut the tutoring.

And most importantly, kids know when they are getting too much help, which may indicate to them that you don't think that they “measure up” to your expectations, which can erode their self-confidence about their own abilities.

Remember—the more you give kids to do, the more they can do. The less you give them to do, the less than can do. More importantly, by having students hone their skills while they're still at home, you'll allow them to develop their confidence in their ability to cope at college and beyond.