

Organization and Management of Tasks-- And How it Coincides with Academic Progress

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It is interesting to consider how organization skills transfer to the development of academic skills. In a general sense, it can make it difficult for students to keep track of assignments and paperwork, as well as the important task of time management for keeping on top of daily homework and projects. If it is difficult for you to keep track of your tangible paperwork, this will get in the way of actually completing it efficiently. If you don't know where your papers are, it's harder to get them done and turned in.

*Max, as well as other students that I've worked with, can find that this interferes with their daily life quite often. It is important to establish firm guidelines for how we will organize physical paperwork, and then in a larger sense, to keep track of deadlines so that big projects do not suddenly come upon us at the last minute when we could've been working on them all along. These two parallel tasks both need strict systems in order for the student to progress.

I know that Max has struggled with keeping track of where he puts his homework and when he is going to complete it. We have talked about various organizational strategies to help him. We talked about color coding his folders, so that he associates the color red with all English assignments, the color blue with all math assignments, etc. Over time, if he puts everything related to one subject into color-coded folders and binders that forever stay associated with that subject area, the visual reminder will help. It is extremely important at all times to have visual reminders because they are the most concrete.

We have also talked about using images for each task and stacking them in order (ie, storyboarding) to use visual reminders to cue him in organizing these tasks. When he gets a homework assignment, the visual reminder to put it in a color-coded binder, followed by the visual reminder to input any dates that need to be remembered into a weekly calendar, are very helpful. Visual reminders become ingrained over time, and many students, including Max, have difficulty following too many steps at once, so this breaks it down piece by piece.

The sequence of visual reminders specific to each child can be placed on their desk and they can be reminded to look at them when it comes to a task that requires organization skills. If they have a personal system for keeping track of physical objects and of assignments, with very specific visual clues that break it down step-by-step so that they know and are reminded of their organization system every time it is required, it will become easier over time.

I also wanted to add one note about how difficulty with organization can affect academic progress. Reading comprehension is based on the understanding of sequencing--that one thing

logically progresses to the next in a story. Many students have difficulty with this and students with ACC that I have worked with have found it to be more challenging to keep track of the logical sequence of events in a story. It is important to break down each piece into visual elements that can be sequenced. I have students read stories with simple sequencing, such as a bedtime routine (which they can also relate to) and retell the sequence. I also have them write their own sequences, such as their own bedtime routine.

In one lesson, I had the student read several pieces that involved logical sequences and discussed each step of the way what had happened in previous steps. He had difficulty with remembering previous steps in sequences that he read, but did a great job with writing down events that happen in order. He was able to logically describe activities step-by-step in sequence, and then write them, so his ability to read and retain sequences in stories will continue to improve with practice of expressing how things happen in sequence. This will help him think more about sequences when he reads, as he gets used to the idea that each part of a story progresses from what proceeded it. Reading and writing are parallel processes and one lends competency toward the other. In the same vein, organization in one's daily life leads to better comprehension of the inherent organization and order within academic subject areas.

*Name has been changed.

Note: Max has Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum

About Alexandra Berube

Alexandra is the Managing Director of Boston Tutoring Services, a tutoring company that offers one-to-one in-home tutoring in Massachusetts. She is also a former Kindergarten teacher who also tutors students in grades K-8, in all subject areas, including test preparation.

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