

# Cool, Calm, and Collected:

Organization and focus skills to keep your student on track

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# Objectives

- **After this training, parents will be able to:**
  - Understand the adolescent brain & its effect on students' study and focus
  - Identify different organization & study skills & ascertain what works best for your family
  - Implement a system with students
  - Model skills so students can work toward self-reliance

# Discussion: What is your “why?”

- What made you want to attend this workshop today?
- How do you feel about your family’s current organization and study skills?
- What are you doing well?
- What could be improved?

# Cognitive development in elementary age children

- Younger school-age children, six to 12 years old, should be at the "concrete operations" stage of Piaget's cognitive development theory, characterized by the ability to use logical and coherent actions in thinking and solving problems. They understand the concepts of permanence and conservation by learning that volume, weight, and numbers may remain constant despite changes in outward appearance. These children should be able to build on past experiences, using them to explain why some things happen. Their attention span should increase with age, from being able to focus on a task for about 15 minutes at age six to an hour by age nine.
- As kids get older, they can focus for longer periods of time. But attention spans are a bit like rubber bands. They can get longer when kids are really interested in a task—like when they're watching a funny video. And they can get shorter when kids are less interested in a task, like when they're doing homework.


# Cognitive development in middle schoolers

- In adolescence, a fundamental reorganization of the brain takes place that continues into the beginning of the third decade of life.
- Adolescent brain development is characterized by an imbalance between the limbic and reward systems, which mature earlier, and the not yet fully mature prefrontal control system. This imbalance may be the neural substrate for the typical emotional reactive style of adolescence, and it may promote risky behavior.

# Cognitive development & focus

- These changes are why our students can have difficulty staying focused, organized, and other skills that involve executive functioning
- It's not just them... *and it's not just you!*

# Self-assessments for students



Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Choose the answer that best describes you.

Study Habit	Already Do	Plan to Do	Not Interested
Study every day.			
Create a quiet place at home to study.			
Turn off the phone, TV, and other distractions when studying.			
Play quiet background music.			
Study in a way that suits your learning style.			
Take short but frequent breaks, like 5 minutes every half hour.			
Study early (don't wait until the last minute).			
Study the hardest things first and then move on to easier ones.			
Spend the most time on things that are hardest.			
Ask for help if you are struggling with something.			
Take notes as you study, using your own words to simplify complex ideas.			
Keep your notes in a notebook or folder.			
Review your notes on a regular basis.			
Make connections between what you are studying and what you know.			
Take practice tests, so you don't panic when it's time for the real test.			
Use a planner or agenda to keep track of your study progress.			
Reward yourself after a good study session.			
Quiz yourself about what you just studied.			
<b>Total</b>			

Developing good study habits can be a challenge, especially if you already have a busy life. But don't dismiss the importance of studying.

Want to aim for the best study habits possible? The ultimate goal would be for all of your responses to appear in the "Already Do" column.

So take a look at your "Plan to Do" column and give one or two of the items listed a try. By improving just one or two additional study habits, you may soon see a jump in your test scores. And that's what developing good study habits is all about!

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**EDUCATIONPLANNER**

- Which Study Habits Can You Improve?
- <http://www.educationplanner.org/students/self-assessments/improving-study-habits.shtml>

# Self-assessments for students

**STUDY SKILLS  
SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

STUDYING	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
1. I study where it is quiet and has few distractions.			
2. I study for a length of time then take a short break before returning to studying.			
3. I have all my supplies handy when I study, such as pens, paper, calculator, etc.			
4. I set study goals, such as the number of problems I will do or pages I will read.			
5. I study at least two hours for every hour I am in class each week.			

MANAGING YOUR TIME	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
6. I use a planner (or other method) to write down upcoming academic and personal activities.			
7. I use a "to do" list to keep track of completing my academic and personal activities.			
8. I start studying for quizzes and tests at least several days before I take them.			
9. I start papers and projects as soon as they are assigned.			
10. I have enough time for school and fun.			

TAKING NOTES	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
11. I take notes as I read my text books.			
12. I take notes during class lectures.			
13. I rework, rewrite, or type up my notes.			
14. I compare my notes with a classmate.			
15. I try to organize main ideas and details into a meaningful method.			

READING TEXT BOOKS	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
16. I browse the headings, pictures, charts, questions and summaries before I start reading a chapter.			
17. I make questions from a chapter before, during, and after reading it.			
18. I try to get the meaning of new words as I see them for the first time.			
19. I look for familiar concepts as well as ideas that spark my interest as I read.			
20. I look for the main ideas as I read.			

- Study Skills Self Assessment
- <https://www.suu.edu/academicsuccess/tutoring/pdf/study-skills-self-assessment.pdf>



# 7 questions for healthy homework communication

- Before we even start the homework, tell me: how can I help you?
- Tell me what you did with this content/activity/book in school today?
- Do you like this problem-solving method/book/project? If not, what are you doing in school that you do enjoy?
- This looks different from what you brought home yesterday. Sometimes when someone gives me something new, I am afraid I won't be able to do it. Is that something you're feeling?

## 7 questions for healthy homework communication, continued

- **What do you think the teacher wants you to get out of this assignment? How can you work with your teacher to make sure that you understand the homework?**
- **Just do as much as you can, and then let's make a list of questions you have about this assignment and you can bring them in to your teacher tomorrow. What are some of your questions?**
- **What can we do together when you're done with the homework?**

# Set a SMART goal

- **Specific-** Students need to clarify the who, what, when, and where of their goal. Have a discussion about using words that are specific vs. those that are ambiguous, or subject to interpretation.
- **Measurable-** Students need to be able to know when they have reached their goal or if they are making progress toward it. Have a discussion about quantitative vs. qualitative measurement.

# Set a SMART goal

- **Attainable/Actionable-** Students need to be realistic about what they can achieve this school year with the time and resources they have available. While "going to college" is a worthy goal, this is far into the future for most students. Work with students to help them understand that goals must also be things students can take action on now.

# Set a SMART goal

- **Relevant-** Students should be able to explain the personal and academic benefits. Talk with them about qualities that make a goal worthwhile.
- **Timely-** Students need to be able to achieve the goal by the end of the school year. As students are writing have them share their goals to help them see if a single school year is a deadline that makes sense for this goal.

# Get organized

- **If you've ever looked in your student's backpack or locker, you know how overwhelming it can be to stay organized**
- **Students have class material across different apps (Google Classroom, PowerSchool, online textbooks, etc) and physical media (notebooks, worksheets)**

# Get organized

- Help your student keep track of all their assignments in one place for example a paper agenda, or utilize google classroom and power school, or try an app/website
  - Get in the habit of writing in the planner after every class or at least every school day, and reviewing after school or Sunday nights
- <https://myhomeworkapp.com/>
  - <https://www.mystudylife.com/>
  - <https://www.istudentpro.com/>

# Utilize time-blocks for studying/homework

## THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE



**STEP 1**  
CHOOSE THE TASK



**STEP 2**  
SET A TIMER FOR  
25 MINUTES



**STEP 3**  
WORK ON THE  
TASK UNTIL TIMER  
BEEPS



**STEP 4**  
TAKE A SHORT  
BREAK OF 3-5 MIN



**STEP 5**  
REPEAT THE CYCLE 4 TIMES  
TAKE A LONGER BREAK AFTER 4 SESSIONS

- Choose your task and total time to work on it.
- Set a timer to 25 minutes.
- Work on the task for 25 minutes. Avoid all distractions and urges to multi-task.
- Take a 5-minute break for energy renewal, start another Pomodoro.
- Take a 20-30 minute break after completing four Pomodoros.



# Take a brain break



# Eliminate distractions- set parental controls

- Limit time on certain apps (social media, games)
- Set “downtime” at night to ensure your student is getting enough sleep
- [For Iphone](#)
- [For Windows computer](#)
- [For Chromebook](#)

# Stay positive

- **Most parents agree, in our busy lives with work, family, and other obligations- homework can be an added source of stress**
- **Our own issues related to school and the way our caregivers reacted to our school stress can come up**
- **Keep open communication with your child's teacher if homework is becoming a major concern impacting your child**

# Stay positive

- If you find you and your student are escalating, take a short break
- If your child is feeling stressed or anxious with the amount of homework or level of difficulty, remind them to stay positive. They can practice re-affirmation techniques and say phrases like “I can do this” and “I will figure this out”.
- Taking deep breaths can also be a helpful tool when you see a child start to meltdown.

# Stay positive

## 35 Affirmations

to give kids confidence

- |                             |                                  |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>I am smart</b>           | <b>I learn from my mistakes</b>  |
| <b>I am brave</b>           | <b>I believe in myself</b>       |
| <b>I am kind</b>            | <b>I can make a difference</b>   |
| <b>I can be a leader</b>    | <b>I am proud of myself</b>      |
| <b>I choose to include</b>  | <b>I am a good sport</b>         |
| <b>I can do hard things</b> | <b>I can reach my goals</b>      |
| <b>I am capable</b>         | <b>I respect myself</b>          |
| <b>I can try again</b>      | <b>Each day is a fresh start</b> |
| <b>Today is a good day</b>  | <b>I am creative</b>             |
| <b>I am loved</b>           | <b>I am a great listener</b>     |
| <b>I am a good friend</b>   | <b>I make good choices</b>       |
| <b>I am well liked</b>      | <b>I am fun</b>                  |
| <b>I am responsible</b>     | <b>I work hard</b>               |
| <b>I am enough</b>          | <b>No one is quite like me</b>   |
| <b>I try my best</b>        | <b>I am a great kid</b>          |
| <b>I am courageous</b>      | <b>I never give up</b>           |
|                             | <b>I am talented</b>             |

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## CALM DOWN WITH TAKE 5 BREATHING



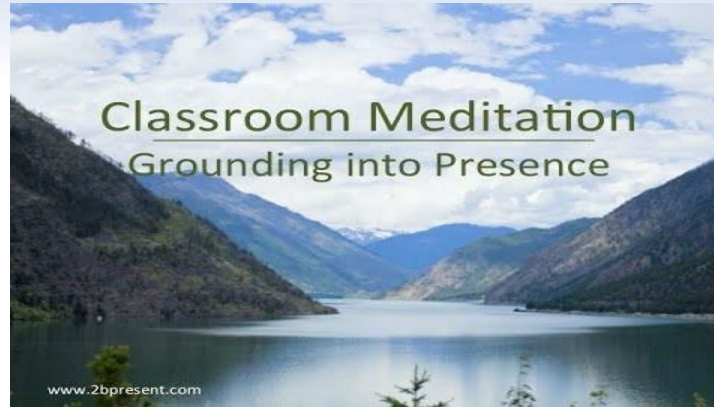
1. Stretch your hand out like a star.
  2. Get the pointer finger of your other hand ready to trace your fingers up and down.
  3. Slide up each finger slowly ~ slide down the other side.
  4. Breathe in through your nose ~ out through your mouth.
  5. Put it together and breathe in as you slide up and breathe out as you slide down.
- Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand.

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# Decompress together

- **If your interactions around homework are stressful, be sure to balance it with some time doing something you both enjoy**
- **Cook dinner together, watch a show, play a video game**

# Meditation for before/after homework



# Additional Supports

- **Your child's Guidance Counselor, Student Assistance Counselor, and the Child Study Team**
- **The Care Plus School Based Clinician**
- **Perform Care (877-652-7624)- for Children's Mobile Response or in-home therapy**





# Questions / Comments / Discussion

- **Anything you plan to implement?**
- **Anything that has worked for you the other families may benefit from?**

# References

- <https://wehavekids.com/education/Why-and-How-to-Teach-Organization-Skills-to-Middle-School-Students>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3705203/>
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Whats-Going-On-in-the-Teenage-Brain.aspx>
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- <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/people/gwen-bass>
- <https://creativeeducator.tech4learning.com/2017/lessons/set-SMART-goals>
- <http://www.healthofchildren.com/C/Cognitive-Development.html#:~:text=Cognitive%20development%20refers%20to%20how,%2C%20language%20development%20%2C%20and%20memory.>