

Intervention Guide Parent Tip Sheet



Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition

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Many children sometimes struggle with schoolwork. For some children, these struggles are temporary and go away after giving some extra effort. However, for others, these struggles last much longer and result in frustration, poor grades, and a dislike of school. These children are sometimes described as having **academic problems**.

Sometimes parents worry that learning problems mean a child isn't smart, but this isn't true. Many intelligent people have struggled with learning. Some successful business leaders and famous actors report they struggled with academic problems. Research shows that students who overcome learning problems can be very successful. They become good college students, strong leaders, great teachers, and great business persons.

Academic problems can have many different causes. Some children have problems with memory, while others have trouble sorting out the most important pieces of information that are read or spoken by a teacher. Children may also

Academic problems can be caused by many factors, including:

- learning disabilities
- presence of emotional or behavioral problems
- environmental conditions
- attitude and motivation

Teaching new skills to your child is key to better learning.

struggle with learning because of poor study habits, low motivation levels, or behavioral or emotional problems. Regardless of the cause, there are many ways to help these children learn.

As a parent, you play an important role in helping your child overcome his or her learning problems. This tip sheet contains several ways to help your child become a better learner. Keep in mind that you are not alone in this effort. Your child's school is

also interested in helping your child succeed. In fact, this tip sheet is one example of how your school is trying to help. Working together to set goals and develop ways to help your child will ensure success. Children who see the same goals at both school and home typically learn faster than those who do not.

Dealing With Academic Problems

Academic problems may lead to:

- low grades
- increased risk of repeating a grade
- higher rates of dropping out of school

You can help your child manage his or her academic problems and experience success in school by teaching your child how to:

- track his or her behavior
- simplify multi-step tasks
- create hints
- review progress while learning



Dealing With Academic Problems

This tip sheet provides information that might be helpful for improving your child's academic problems. With the help of your child's school, you can help your child understand and manage his or her learning problems. Research tells us that when parents and schools work together to set goals and plan strategies, children learn and grow more quickly.

The following pages discuss approaches that will give you the tools you need to help improve your child's learning problems.

Working With Your Child

Talking with your child about problems he or she is having in school can be hard. Saying things like, "How did you fail your spelling test?" or, "I can't believe you got a D in math class," can make it harder. They can signal to your child that he or she is in trouble, which may make your child less likely to talk with you about why he or she is having problems. Instead, try to approach the topic in a more neutral way. For example, you might say, "It looks like you had a hard spelling test today," or, "I saw your report card today; do you want to talk about it?" Use language that **focuses on the problem** and not the child to make your child more comfortable talking with you.

When talking with your child about academic problems, make sure to:

- focus on the problem
- commit to a working time
- focus on only one or two problem areas
- adjust to the needs of your child

Did you know?

- Almost 2.9 million students receive special-education services for learning problems in the United States.
- Nearly 39% of students with learning problems drop out of high school each year, compared to 11% of the general student population.
- Up to 80% of students with a learning disability have reading problems.
- Two-thirds of junior high and high school students with learning problems are reading three or more grade levels behind, and 20% are reading five or more grade levels behind.

Once you have talked about the problem with your child, you can start your plan to help. **Pick a time each day** to practice learning strategies with homework. Choose a time that is devoted only to working together so that you can sit with your child without other distractions. Adjust the amount of time spent working according to the needs of your child. You may choose to reward your child by ending the working session early once he or she understands the topic that is being worked on. Rewards that are used for other events can also be helpful. For example, you may let your child pick a reward after the first week of meetings in order to keep your child motivated to improve his or her skills.

Some children have problems in several areas. If this is the case with your child, **choose only one or two areas** to focus on. Sometimes, it might be best to choose the area that your child is having the most trouble with. Other times, it might be best to allow your child to decide which area to work on.

The strategies in this tip sheet include some common practices many children use to do better in school. If your child has been diagnosed with a learning disability or other specific problem, there are many ways to help. Be sure to talk with the person who gave you this tip sheet for specific strategies for your child.



Tracking Behavior

Children sometimes have trouble with behaviors such as paying attention in class, turning in homework assignments on time, and asking questions. Parents can help a child with these challenges by tracking problem behaviors.

You can teach your child how to track his or her behavior by following these steps.

1. Identify the problem behavior (e.g., not completing homework on time).
2. Choose a behavior to replace the problem behavior and set a goal (e.g., complete and turn in homework 4 out of 5 days each week).
3. Have your child record each time the new behavior is used (e.g., use the chart contained in this tip sheet).
4. Provide a small reward when the goal is met. Reduce the number of rewards after the newly learned behavior becomes part of your child's regular behavior.
5. If the problem behavior continues, try a different behavior to replace the problem behavior or make the initial goal easier to obtain.

EXAMPLE:

Simon is getting bad grades in several classes because he isn't completing his homework. His parents help him to set homework goals and create a checklist to track: when he completes and turns in homework, finishes homework within an hour of arriving home, turns in homework the next day, and when his parents must remind him to complete his homework. Each day that Simon turns in his homework, he receives 30 extra minutes of phone or TV time. For a bigger reward each week, Simon must turn in his homework at least three of the five days.

Simplifying Multi-Step Tasks

Children with academic problems sometimes get frustrated doing tasks that involve several steps. This frustration can lead to them "giving up." Parents can support a child by helping the child break up tasks into smaller parts, making them easier to follow.

1. Choose a task from a school assignment or home that consists of several steps (e.g., taking dirty clothes from the bedroom and putting them in the laundry room).
2. Complete the task with your child. Talk through each step. For example, when teaching your child how to solve a story problem in math, you might tell him or her to: (1) Highlight key parts of the directions. (2) Read the story two times. (3) Write down the numbers used in the story. (4) Create an equation from the story. (5) Write down the solution to the missing part of the equation. (6) Add the solution to the equation to make sure it makes sense.
3. Have your child complete the task while you say the steps aloud. For tasks that require memorizing steps, try to come up with a word or phrase that will help your child remember the steps (see the Creating Hints strategy). Encourage your child to practice by visualizing completion of the task.
4. After having a few chances to complete the task, ask your child to describe the steps to you, as a method to check for understanding. When working with your child, be sure to choose a time that does not compete with other activities and does not occur immediately before bedtime; this will help keep your child focused on the desired task.

EXAMPLE:

Leon has trouble answering questions about books he has read for reading class. His father teaches him to write down notes about the story while reading it. His father tells Leon certain parts that can be found in most stories. He and Leon then read a story together. He helps Leon find each part of the story. Over the next few weeks, Leon practices reading stories and answering questions his father asks about the stories.

Creating Hints

Children with academic problems may have trouble remembering basic facts. Parents can use different strategies to help a child remember information.

1. Create words (or acronyms) that contain letters to help remember facts. In science class, children are often taught “ROY G BIV” to remember the visible colors of light (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet).
2. Use pictures to help remember facts or vocabulary words. Some children are able to visualize images that contain the facts being learned. The word “carline” means “old woman,” so a child might picture an old woman in a car to remember the meaning.
3. Create songs to help remember facts. A common example is the song used to teach the alphabet to young children.
4. Use objects to help remember facts. For example, some children are taught to use the knuckles on their hands to remember which months of the year have 31 days. When listing the months in order, months that fall on the knuckles have 31 days. Months that fall between the knuckles have fewer than 31 days.

Reviewing While Learning

Children sometimes have trouble learning basic concepts in school. Parents can help a child by teaching strategies to identify key facts and concepts.

1. Summarize: Teach your child to identify the key points in a lesson or book. For example, key points in a lesson on the history of flight might be the names of the people involved in the flight and when it occurred. A less important point might be how long the flight lasted. Start with the most basic points in a lesson. Then, add to the number of key points as the child gets better at identifying them.
2. Paraphrase: Once a fact or concept is learned, ask the child to describe it using his or her own words. Children who can describe something in a way that is different from how it was learned are more likely to understand and remember it.
3. Read, write, and review: This approach can work well with written materials. The child reads a section of the materials, and then writes a brief summary of what the section was about. The child then reviews his or her summary compared to what was read. The child continues this until his or her summary is correct.



When should I expect my child's grades to improve?

The strategies included in this tip sheet should lead to improved learning within a few weeks. For some children, improvement may mean an increase in the amount of on-time homework turned in. For other children, improvement may mean better grades on homework assignments or tests. Be sure to set standards or goals that are realistic for your child.

What should I do if I don't notice any change in my child's performance or schoolwork?

Try new examples or new intervention approaches. Also, increase the amount of time you spend practicing the intervention strategy with your child. If these approaches do not seem to be helping your child, talk with the person who gave you this tip sheet. He or she may have additional strategies you can try. He or she may also have good suggestions for making small changes to the things you are already doing. Talking to your child's teacher can also be a good way to help your child. Most teachers will welcome your questions and will be happy to help.



Where can I get more information?

Many books have been written that describe ways to help children learn. The person who provided you with this guide might be able to recommend books relevant to your child's age. If you have access to the Internet, the websites of the following organizations are good sources of information. Conduct a search using keywords such as "help with homework" or similar phrases to generate a long list of educational and commercial websites that might prove helpful. Your local school's website may also provide useful information.

www.ed.gov

Many handouts, booklets, and online resources for parents, teachers, and others who care for and teach children can be found on the Department of Education website. This site also includes a link to the "What Works Clearinghouse" that features reports on the effectiveness of educational interventions.

http://figurethis.nctm.org/

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics offers a Family Corner on this website with many suggestions for improving a child's math skills.

www.reading.org

The International Literacy Association's website offers a Parent Resources section that provides suggestions for improving your child's interest and ability in reading.

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