

GATE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELING RESOURCE NEWSLETTER

March 2018 Edition

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Greetings,

This is the March 2018 edition of the monthly GATE resource newsletters. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide educators with information, practical ideas, classroom interventions and strategies related to the specific characteristics and social-emotional needs of GT middle school students.

Study Habits

This month's newsletter topic is study habits. Developing good study habits can be daunting for some students, while for others, it may come easily. Many middle school students feel lost and need guidance in order to develop good study habits, especially during the transition from elementary to middle school due to the new set of rules, procedures, and expectations from adults. Included in this month's newsletter resources are three articles by Dr. Sylvia Rimm, to help parents and educators guide students towards improving their study habits, even as we approach the end of the school year. The resources attached also include a practical study habits list, questions for student interviews to identify specific areas of improvement in study habits, and recommended books.

<u>Featured Resources</u> <u>(attached):</u>	<u>Recommended Books/Websites:</u>
1. Organizational Skills – article by Dr. Sylvia Rimm	1. The Executive Functioning Workbook for Teens (2013), by Sharon A. Hansen Students may use this workbook on their own or with adult supervision to identify and work on specific interest areas of executive functioning skills such as organization, time management, flexibility, emotion control, working memory, etc.

<p>2. How Parents Can Help With Homework (But Not Too Much) - article by Dr. Sylvia Rimm</p> <p>3. Improving Your Children's Performance in the Second Half of the Year - article by Dr. Sylvia Rimm</p> <p>4. Questions for Student Interviews – a helpful survey for students to identify areas of strength and potential improvement from Differentiation for Gifted Learners. Going Beyond the Basics by Diane Heacox</p> <p>5. 10 Important Study Habits – quick checklist of good study habits from Self-Regulation in the Classroom by Richard M. Cash</p>	<p>2. Smart but Scattered (2009), by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare This book is an effective resource for both parents and educators that offers tools for helping kids develop good study habits.</p> <p>3. Train Your Brain for Success (2012), by Randy Kulman, Ph.D. This great book may help teens improve organization, focus, attention, time management, metacognition, etc.</p>
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ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

WHICH PART OF ORGANIZATION NEEDS ATTENTION?

Many parents and teachers complain about children's organizational skills, and many kids admit that organizational skills cause them problems in school. Although disorganization is identified as the culprit, parents, teachers, and kids themselves are unclear about what is specifically wrong. By examining the elements of organizational skills, it will be easier to identify and improve the skills that kids need help with. The inset shows the nine main elements of organizational skills. I'll describe each element separately and offer suggestions to help kids improve in areas where they need practice. This will help you to identify your child's specific problems so he can correct them.



ELEMENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

Putting like things together. This concept is basic to organization. Whether kids learn to pair socks, put their library books together in a special place on a shelf, organize incomplete homework separate from complete homework, or arrange their favorite singers' CD's together, they're learning an essential first of organization that will help them find what they want when they need it. This skill is so basic that even preschool children can begin learning to put like things together.



Predicting time. Sensitize kids to how long it takes them to bathe, dress, brush their teeth, or walk to the bus stop and it will help them to be ready on time for school or activities. Noticing how much time it takes to study for a test or complete a math assignment will help them plan. Making them time-conscious will permit them to allocate enough preparation and prevent the daily frenzy that some parents and kids experience when they're always late. You may want

to use a timer or stopwatch at first to measure and chart their time. Once they're more realistic about their needed preparation, they'll learn how much time to allow.

Scheduling. After kids calculate the time it takes for their daily activities and study, they can prepare a weekly schedule to visually understand and communicate their activities for the week. Kids can keep their own schedule and add their personal activities to a family schedule that can be posted on a refrigerator or bulletin board. In this way, parents and kids can better manage carpools, taxiing, and duplication of activities. It may take a fair amount of juggling on the parents' part to cope with gymnastics, soccer, and music lessons of several children. A realistic schedule helps.

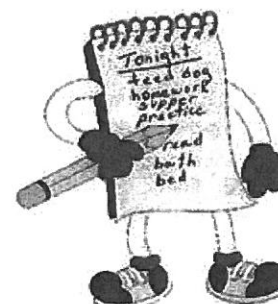
Remembering. Assignment books are great for remembering assignments, as long as kids don't forget to use them. Kids like to believe they'll remember their homework or activities without writing them down, but it often is only an excuse for forgetting to do something or be somewhere. Kids have amazing facility at remembering what's important to them, but falter when their responsibilities are not first priority. Parents who make lists for their own remembering are good role models for kids who must also learn to keep track of responsibilities. Kids can invent their own special system for remembering, but they need to prove it's effective if they plan to continue to use it.

Prioritizing. As kids' lives get busier, it's important to join your kids in prioritizing their most important responsibilities. Discussing priorities helps kids

learn to evaluate their activities and determine which ones they absolutely must do and those they can accomplish only if time allows. Prioritizing helps families to balance work and play. Doing homework before watching television may not be a choice kids prefer, but they'll find it more effective.

Eliminating. In the process of prioritizing, parents and kids together may decide that kids simply have to drop a sport or activity. By discussing what should be eliminated, kids clarify their own values while understanding their parents' perspectives on activities as well. Sometimes, you may have to insist that kids drop an activity, but it's better to make this a joint decision and ask for their thoughts on which activity they'd like to drop. There may be times when you'll disagree. Listen to your kids' perspectives, but don't hesitate to speak up if you consider their choices harmful.

Reviewing. The process of review helps kids to realize that their decisions aren't permanent and can be revised at a later date. Prioritizing and eliminating will need repetition every few months if schedules become too hectic again. Kids can add activities they've dropped or drop some they've added as they learn to evaluate their daily lives and interests regularly.



Establishing good habits. Study, chores, and organization become much more automatic and less frustrating if kids develop good habits. Doing schoolwork and chores before play is a good habit that prevents procrastination. Rechecking assignments is a good practice for curbing carelessness. It's also important to avoid bad habits because they, too, can become automatic. Bad habits like skipping breakfast, arguing daily, staying up late, or ignoring homework cause great problems for kids.

Maintaining flexibility. The quotation I enjoy sharing is, "Habits are the best of servants, and the worst of masters." It's true that good habits can foster efficiency, but it's just as true that kids who are mastered by inflexible habits lose opportunities for creativity, spontaneity, and fun. Intentionally teaching kids to make exceptions to their schedules can prepare them to adjust to change and can enhance their lives without destroying their organization and efficiency.

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HOW PARENTS CAN HELP WITH HOMEWORK (BUT NOT TOO MUCH)

Homework is a controversial topic in many households. Children vary in their responses to school expectations of homework and study. Achieving children usually study at a desk or table in a quiet place, although some listen to music. Underachievers, however, exhibit a great many troublesome study habits. Many believe that they study best while lying on their beds with headsets on, watching TV, and reading something over once quickly. Other underachievers do homework only after they're nagged, scolded, reminded, and supervised. Even then, they protest and avoid quality work. A third group of children sit with a parent nightly, certain that they can't complete their assignments without that parent's assistance and direct supervision. Finally, there are some underachievers who simply don't do homework or study at all. As parents of children who may be in one of these last four groups, you may wonder how your children fell into such bad habits and why other children have better habits.



Good study habits begin with an appropriate time and place. In determining a good time for study, you'll need to work around your own family schedules. However, some general rules can guide you in setting both a time and a place.

Children should be allowed time for a break immediately after school to have a snack, enjoy some physical activity, or chat. Many children like to watch TV during that break time; however, television puts children into a passive mode, making it difficult to move them from TV to homework. It's better to insist that television follow study and homework. Explain to your children that exercise is both relaxing and energizing and is more appropriate after a day of sitting. You may also wish to use a plug lock* for your television to emphasize its nonuse before homework.



Children are more motivated to do their homework if they have something to look forward to after it's completed. If possible, at least part of their study time should take place prior to the evening meal, leaving time after study for watching television, reading, or playing games. When study time is too late in the evening, children are often tired and tend to daydream or dawdle. Most children don't like to sleep (it's adults who do), so homework can become a "stay-up-late" manipulation if it takes place just before bedtime.

The amount of study time varies with children's grade and school requirements. Elementary school children might study from 15 minutes to an hour; middle school children from one to one and a half hours; and high school students from one and a half to two hours per evening. Three or more hours may be required for students in highly academic high schools. If children say they have completed all of their homework before their allotted study time, suggest that they use the remainder of the scheduled time for reading over material, organizing notes, doing extra reading, or creative writing. Except for long-term projects, younger children rarely have homework on weekends, so there is no need for weekend study time for most children.



An appropriate study place is equally important for providing an atmosphere where children will learn efficiently. Sitting at a desk with good lighting in a quiet place away from parents and siblings will help children concentrate better and become more actively involved in the material.

Some children insist that they can't study without music. If you're preparing them for academic success, it seems realistic for them to develop habits that will help them adjust to environments which will open educational doors for them. (I've never heard of SATs being given with music blaring, nor do most high school teachers play music in their classrooms.) After your children have learned to concentrate in a quiet atmosphere, they may certainly introduce quiet music gradually and experimentally provided the sound doesn't interfere with their concentration.

There's another advantage to separating your children from family activity during study. Dependent children, who are likely to ask questions before they've tried to solve problems on their own, are less likely to do so if Mom or Dad are physically located at a distance. It's important for your children to take the initiative to work on their homework independently before they ask for help. You should only answer questions after your children have made a determined effort to work out the material on their own. Don't sit with your children during homework time. It's their responsibility to do their homework and yours to take an interest and monitor only when appropriate.

Showing an interest in your children's homework is always important. Reading a story they've written or checking for errors of a composition might be helpful if your children request it. Discussing ideas or quizzing your children in spelling or Spanish is a fine show of support. You may also work with children on

special projects; however, it is important that you only offer your guidance and not become overly involved, or they will begin to feel like the homework project is your responsibility instead of theirs.



If your children are underachievers, you'll want to check their homework on a regular basis to be certain they're completing quality work; however, don't correct it as a teacher would. If they've done their homework carelessly, point that out, and let them know that members of your family take pride in their work. If it appears that they're not comprehending a concept, take time to explain it. If you see a misspelled word or an obvious error, you may point it out.

Mothers are often assigned the task of schoolwork supervision, but mothers or fathers can help their children. For boys, it's often helpful if Dad takes the major responsibility for helping with or monitoring schoolwork, especially if the child is not performing well in school. It is important for Dads to communicate clearly to their sons about how important they believe schoolwork is.

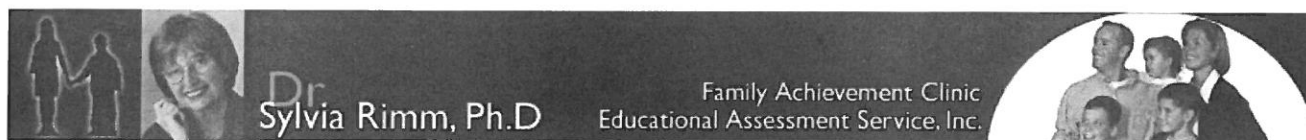
Parents should always take an enthusiastic and positive interest in their children's schoolwork and learning. It makes a great difference to them!

****For information about plug locks, call 800/475-1118.***

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IMPROVING YOUR CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE YEAR

If your children's recent report cards reflected problems, it's time to make their grade improvement a family project. Serious involvement by parents (both if there are two available) can communicate to your children the importance of school achievement.

Be disappointed in their performance rather than angry at them. Punishments will probably only get them angry at you. Your disappointment may bring on their tears, but don't let those tears dissuade you from taking the problem seriously. If they tell you they can handle it alone, and this is the first time they've had problems, you can let them try to manage improvement and only offer help. If you've heard these words before, explain to them that this time you must be involved to be sure they understand what a priority their education is to the whole family. As you talk to them about the problems, envision yourself as a coach rather than a judge. You're about to coach them for success in school because the whole family needs to be a winning team. Avoid comments like "Grades don't count as long as you're learning" or "I didn't get very good grades either; you'll grow out of it." Instead, emphasize that together you can identify what problems they are having, and help them toward success.

1. **Discuss each subject with your children.** Let them explain to you why they think they received a particular grade and what they think they should do to improve a grade if it needs improvement. Listen carefully to their perception of what the problem is so you can help them clarify any false interpretations, and be sure not to side with them against their teachers. If you do believe it's mainly a teacher problem, you'll want to try to fix it, but it's important for your children not to learn to manipulate you against their teachers. Teachers require parent support in order to successfully teach your children.
2. **Contact the teacher for a conference.** If your conferences with your children leave you puzzled about performance, or if you have further questions, teachers may be able to clarify grades or comments. They may also explain approaches to helping your children study better in particular subjects. Take notes on what the teacher tells you so you can review them at home and can thoroughly understand how to help your children.
3. **Help your children understand the extent of effort that's needed to earn good grades.** Children often believe they're working hard when they aren't. Give them some examples of how to study a subject from your own experience or from what you learned from their teachers. Teach them to test themselves after they have studied to see what they remember. Be sure you don't sit with them the entire time they're working, or they will become dependent on you, but do review with them after they're done to be sure they're doing quality work. Explain that doing their best truly means putting their whole self into their work.
4. **Set up a plan for homework and study involvement.** That may mean communication between home and school, or even consequences. It's important for your children to learn to be accountable, to get all their work in, and to not get in the habit of making excuses. Consequences, for example earning points for regular homework completion, help to motivate children to persevere. Postponing social plans on the weekend until all work is complete and caught up makes sense. Too much grounding and punishment tends to become counterproductive. Kids give up and sometimes even get depressed if you overuse punishments.
5. **Get interested in your children's learning.** Help them to extend and enrich their learning; for example, if they're studying about the Renaissance, consider taking them to an art museum or concert to learn about art or music of that period. Encourage family science or social studies projects that teach how to go beyond what's expected. Hands-on activities help children get involved and remember what they've learned. Teachers notice kids who submit special projects.
6. **Consider a school or private psychologist if you require further explanation.** If you do decide to get help, be sure the psychologist includes you in the help process. If there is a sudden deterioration of schoolwork, seek help immediately. This may be an indication of serious problems.



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© Questions for Student Interviews

Following is a preliminary list of questions for a student interview. These questions may be used by teachers and parents, since you are both trying to identify a student's school problems. Sort through the list to see which questions are appropriate for your particular student's age, grade, and circumstances. Ask those, and skip or modify the others.

The questions are grouped by problem area. As you do the interview, you should be able to begin identifying the major causes of your student's school problems, based on the responses he or she gives in each category.

Learning

1. What subject/class are you best in? What subject/class is the most difficult for you?
2. What do you like most about (your best subject/class)?
3. What makes (your most difficult subject/class) so hard for you?
4. What's the hardest thing for you to do: your daily work, the end-of-chapter tests, or independent projects?
5. Can you tell me what caused your grade in (the subject/class where you performed most poorly)?
6. Do you understand the material taught in (your most difficult subject/class)?
7. What school activities or projects do you enjoy the most?
8. Of all your subjects, which one do you think you could improve in? How could you improve your grade in that class?
9. If you feel you are behind in that class, do you think you could catch up? What extra help might you need?
10. What keeps you from being successful in that class? What could you do about it?

Developing Study Habits

1. How much time do you typically spend each day studying or doing homework at home?
2. Do you spend a specific amount of time studying and doing homework, or do you just work until you finish your assignments?
3. Do you have a particular place where you study at home? Describe it to me.
4. Do you have a set time to begin studying each night?
5. If you need to remember something for a test, how do you memorize it?
6. Tell me about your way of taking notes.
7. Can you usually predict what might be on a test? If yes, how can you tell?
8. Do you check over your work before you turn it in?
9. Do you sometimes get distracted during your home studying time? If yes, what kinds of things distract you?
10. How long can you study in one stretch? Do you give yourself a break during study time?
11. Do you reward yourself when your study time is over? →

Adapted from *Up from Underachievement* by Diane Heacox, Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.

© Questions for Student Interviews (continued)

Managing Schoolwork

1. Are there any particular days of the week when it's more difficult to find time to study at home?
2. Is there a particular time of the school year when it's more difficult to study? (Examples: school play, athletic season.)
3. Do you keep an assignment notebook, folder, or calendar? Do you use it regularly? Does it work for you?
4. How do you organize your work for a big project that takes a long time to do? (Can you break down the project into small steps?)
5. If you have several deadlines at the same time, how do you decide what work to do each evening?
6. Each evening, when you start your study time, do you know what work needs to be done and what deadlines you have coming up?

Setting Goals

1. Where do you want to be and what do you want to be doing when you have completed school (or 5 to 10 years from now)?
2. What is the most important thing about school for you? What makes you (or could make you) want to come to school each day?

Dealing with Personal Issues

1. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
2. What do you do to handle stress?
3. Do you believe you are a perfectionist? (Does it bother you if things are not just right? Do you have problems getting your work in on time because it doesn't seem quite finished yet? Do you ever not try something because you don't think you'll be good enough?)

Adapted from *Up from Underachievement* by Diane Heacox, Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.

10 Important Study Habits

1. **Set a regular study time each day.** To get the most out of your time after school, set a specific minimum amount of time (at least 20 minutes) and part of the day when you will study. Even if you are not assigned homework, use your set study time to read a book, magazine, newspaper or investigate websites related to what you are learning in school. It's also wise to set your study time for later afternoon or early evening. It's not a good idea to study right before bed-time, as you will most likely be tired or the study could cause you to become too stimulated to sleep.
2. **Create a space** where there are few distractions, such as noise, clutter, other people, or visuals.
3. **Manage your time** during your study time. During your set amount of study time, parcel out how much time you will spend on each subject or class' homework. Work on the hardest materials first and finish up with the easier materials. Don't spend too much time on any one piece of work.
4. **Organize yourself and materials.** Use a method that works for you. File folders, boxes, computer files, jump drives are all examples of methods to organize materials.
5. **Know your preferred style of learning.** Whether you are an audio, visual or kinesthetic type of learner, consider applying the style while you study.
6. During study time, **take a 2-3 minute break** every 20 minutes. The break can include a stretch, a quick look at email or social media or getting another glass of water.
7. **Be responsive to your regulation.** Recognize when you are wasting time or procrastinating. Always do a self-check on your self-regulation. When wasting time or procrastinating, take a moment to adjust your ABCs. Ask, answer and act upon these questions:
 - a. (A) What am I feeling right now? Why am I feeling this way? What can I do to feel better about what needs to be done?
 - b. (B) What am I doing now? What should I be doing now? What will I do to get the work completed?
 - c. (C) What thoughts are going through my mind now? How can I adjust the way I am thinking about the work that needs to be done? What thinking tools will I need to apply during the work ahead?
8. **Plan for asking for help.** Arrange a person, a website or materials that you can rely upon when you run into difficulties.
9. **Assess yourself after you complete your study.** Write five questions about the materials you covered (no need to answer them—as a well worded question can tell you a lot about how much you know about a topic), or use questions at the end of the chapter to check your understanding.
10. **Reflect on your study time** each day. Ask yourself ABC questions:
 - a. (A) How do I feel now that the study time is over? What motivated/didn't motivate me during my study time? How can I ensure I feel good about studying next time?
 - b. (B) What distracted me during study time? How did I manage my time/stay organized? What will I do better next time?
 - c. (C) How did today's study time help me become a better learner? What thinking tools did I practice during my study time? What tools will I use next time?