

Occupational Therapy Advice for Planning and Organisation

Do you find that your child:

- Is late for things?
- Their room/bag/desk never seems to be tidy?
- They keep forgetting/losing things?
- They forget what they were supposed to do?



This handout contains some ideas to support planning and organisation. Changing habits can sometimes take time as well as acquiring new habits. It is important to persevere when learning any new strategies and that practise is given each week and for several weeks. Don't try too many different ideas at once or you will likely overload your child. Try one, see how you get on and then introduce another skill.

Many children have difficulties with planning and organising themselves. These difficulties can occur at any of the following 3 stages:

1. Ideation – the idea of what you want to do
2. Planning – working out the steps needed to do the task
3. Execution – remembering what you have to do and physically doing the task.

Some tasks can seem overwhelming and the child may not know where to start. You can help by getting them to talk through a task and breaking it down e.g. *"Tell me what you want to do"*, *"What do you need to do first?"* etc. Some people like to use the 'Co-op' approach (cognitive orientation to daily occupational performance):

GOAL – PLAN – DO – CHECK:

Goal: What do I want to do? e.g. look after my school pen so that I don't keep losing it.

Plan: How am I going to do it? e.g. label my pen with my name, put it back into my pencil case when I have finished with it and keep my pencil case in my tray.

Do: Carry out the plan.

Check: How well did my plan work? e.g. Did the label stay in place? Could you find your pen when you needed it?



Build a concept of time:

This is important to help a child orientate themselves during their day and to become more independent.

- Use a timer to time yourself doing certain tasks e.g. getting dressed in the morning so you can build up a concept of time and how long things take you to do.
- Avoid rushing as this increases pressure and the sense of disorganisation. Allow enough time to get things done.
- You may prefer a digital clock where the time is exact, or you may prefer an analogue clock where you can see the time passing. Make sure you have a clock which is best for you.

Time sequencing is also important so the child knows what is going to happen next e.g. play time, lunch, and story time. As children get older they learn to predict not only daily routines but also weekly, monthly and yearly routines.

Have a timetable or calendar on the child's wall with activities in and out of school. Mark on this any projects, special activities or important school dates. Go through this at least once a week.

Becoming more independent with self-care routines:

Keep things visual so that memory prompts are quick and easy. Visual schedules can be helpful for remembering a sequence of steps at different times of the day e.g. in the morning – dressing; in the evening – completing homework and preparing for the next day.

They can be useful in helping a child to become more independent. A visual schedule enables a child to see what you need to do next without having to ask an adult. Schedules can be found online or you can make them yourself either as a list or with photo/picture reminders.

Here are some examples of visual schedules:

Morning Routine



Night Time Routine



- Post-It® notes stuck at eye level on doors are useful reminders too.

Looking after Belongings

- Help your child to get into the habit of checking whether they have their belongings before leaving.
- Bedroom organisation: group similar items together. This will save time and effort and make it easier to find possessions such as clothes, books and toys. Create an order that makes sense e.g. underwear in the top drawer, then t-shirts and trousers in the bottom drawer. Label drawers and cupboards with words or pictures to show where different items are placed. Have a laundry basket in their room so you can easily throw dirty clothes in there.
- Put a clear plastic box by their bedroom door where they can leave their school bag, PE kit and any other items that need to be taken to school each day.
- Have a place for DVD's, books and computer games etc. So the room is kept as clear as possible. Colour code the shelves or boxes so for example, books go in the green box and games go in the red box.

Timetable in a weekly tidy up and preparation session

- This helps keep the task of tidying to a manageable level.
- Prepare for the following week. This helps to reduce feelings of worry if the child is prepared for any changes coming in the week such as a school trip, party or change of teacher etc.
- Have a white board on the wall with important things to remember written on it to support memory. Once these things are done you can cross or wipe them off.
- Always end with something rewarding!

Create a checklist for your weekly session:

To do	Done
Put clean clothes away	√
Put dirty clothes in laundry basket	√
Update calendar for the next week	
Lay clothes out ready for tomorrow	

Homework:

- Make sure there is a timetable available to see what homework needs to be completed and by when.
- Create a routine for home activities so your child knows what to expect and when. You may wish to use a visual schedule to support this e.g.
 - 4pm: home from school and put bag away
 - 4.15pm: drink and snack
 - 4:30pm: homework
 - 5:15pm: play
 - 6pm: dinner
- You can set a homework timer for however long you think it will take to complete a homework task. This gives the child something to aim for.
- Set an alarm for breaks if it is a longer piece of homework.
- Set aside space in your home for homework to be completed. Ideally somewhere quiet with as few distractions as possible.
- Have a homework 'kit' of pencils, pens and other stationary to avoid disturbances.
- If your child is having trouble getting started, read through what needs to be done and jointly create an action plan. Or allow your child to tell you their ideas and jot these down on Post-it notes. These can be stuck on the table/wall and rearranged in order to help give structure to what they need to record in writing.

Organisational skills do not come naturally to all young people. They require more effort. However, when they find strategies or a structure that works and these are put into practise, life can become a lot easier. Find what works for you and your child. Remember to give lots of praise and encouragement. Sometimes you have to return to strategies that have failed before because your child may not have been ready or lacked motivation.