

School Work Refusal - Tip Sheet for Parents

Dear Parents,

As we continue to navigate the waters of distance learning in the time of COVID-19 we want to thank you for your efforts in collaboration. We know that this change has turned your living rooms, hallways, kitchen tables, and other various spaces in your homes into ad hoc classrooms. We know that it is a disruption to normalcy. We know that these spaces and your homes were not set up as traditional classrooms, and we anticipate that in most cases many of you did not go to school to pursue a teaching credential. As we continue to partner, we wanted to pass along evidence-based strategies from the classroom, for you to use at home as needed.

One of the biggest hurdles we are sure you are facing is the fact that your student is now trying to generalize school behavior in an environment they have been practicing home behavior. It is very likely that avoidance of the work all together may be a behavior your student will engage in. Getting them to switch takes time. While we can't turn your living room into your student's classroom there are some adjustments that can be made to make the transfer easier. Since things cannot happen in the traditional classroom, here are suggestions to make this new (and temporary) normal as consistent as possible.

Preventative Strategies:

Don't underestimate the power of a schedule

If you and your children are all doing work from your home, it's likely that this is the first time that has ever happened. A schedule, for your work and your child's work, is extremely important. To start, experts recommend keeping them on the same or similar sleeping schedule that they have when they are going into school. If a schedule was not provided by their teachers, help them write one for not only each day, but each week, as well. Having a clear vision of what is expected of your child will help them see that just because they are home does not mean they don't have work to do. Experts recommend helping them prioritize and learn to create goals, tasks, and deadlines, just like adults do when they go to work.

Make space for learning

Many adults have a specific area of the home in which they do work, and it's important that you create a similar space for your child. Your children will achieve their best work in a quiet, comfortable, and dedicated space that is strictly devoted to learning. This space should be a different set-up than where they normally play games or watch television.

Maintain breaks including lunch

Routines and schedules are extremely important for children at school, and this is no different in their at-home school. Children will function best if they maintain their routine as close to normal as possible. Setting alarms similar to those they would encounter at school can be helpful for keeping them on a schedule. Around lunch time, encourage them to get up, get some fresh air, go for a walk or bike ride, or have a snack so that they are not sedentary for the entire day.

Strategies for the reluctant student:

The Weekend Doesn't Begin Until Overdue Assignments Are Done

If your child has uncompleted work, their weekend shouldn't begin until those assignments are done. In other words, Friday night is a work night if their week's work is not complete. (Saturday too if needed.) This is a highly effective consequence for students because it creates a great incentive to get their work done. Indeed, each minute they're doing homework is a minute they could be hanging out with friends or playing video games.

Use Effective Consequences

When assigning consequences, be sure they're effective consequences. What makes an effective consequence? An effective consequence motivates your child to good behavior. They put you back in control and teach your child how to problem-solve, giving your child the skills needed to be successful.

An effective consequence looks like this:

"If you fail to turn in your work, you can' no longer work in your room and must work at the kitchen table until you get and maintain turning in your work"

Another effective consequence would be the following:

"If you choose not to work during the scheduled time, you will lose your electronics for the night. Tomorrow, you'll get another chance to use them."

And the next day, your child gets to try again to earn the privilege of electronics. Short-term consequences like this are very effective. Just don't take away this privilege for more than a day as your child will have no incentive to do better the next time.

Allow Your Student Some Choice

While maintaining an at home "school schedule" allow for some choice and flexibility. During a 'session' allow them to choose if they are going to work on algebra or English. They may prefer one over the other and often building some momentum makes it easier to start the more challenging work.

Offer encouragement and positive reinforcement for efforts made.

This is new territory for all, and as we all learn to be effective in this situation, we need to remember to offer positive encouragement for efforts towards completion of work. Even if the entire assignment isn't completed. With reluctant learners in the traditional learning environment, we often encourage teachers to express verbal approval for any sign of beginning the assignment, even if the student just picks up the pencil.

Links to Articles:

- <https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/the-homework-battle-how-to-get-children-to-do-homework/>
- <https://www.todayparent.com/kids/4-ways-to-end-the-homework-battle-for-good/>
- <http://theconversation.com/so-your-child-refuses-to-go-to-school-heres-how-to-respond-98935>