

# Homework Strategies for Student Success



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# Objectives

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- Participants will learn:
  - An overview of executive functioning skills and how they impact homework completion
  - The basics of becoming a behavior detective
  - Two key strategies for homework completion
  - How to develop a meaningful incentive system
  - How to involve siblings
- Material adapted from:
  - *Homework: A Guide for Parents*, Peg Dawson, EdD, NCSP



# Executive Functioning Skills

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- Skills required to execute tasks- to take an idea from start to finish
- Motor vehicle analogy
- Hidden curriculum
- Development of executive skills correlate with brain development
  - Frontal lobe skills develop at different rates

# Why Homework?

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- Communication regarding homework policies
- Benefits beyond school achievement
  - Taking responsibility for tasks
  - Develop skills to work independently
  - Develop “habits of mind” that contribute to effective functioning in the future
  - Learn how to:
    - ✦ Plan and organize tasks
    - ✦ Manage time
    - ✦ Make choices
    - ✦ Problem Solve

# Two Key Strategies

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## 1. Routine

- ✓ A sequence of actions regularly followed; a fixed program
- ✓ A sequence of instructions for performing a task that forms a program

## 2. Incentive Systems

- ✓ An item that motivates or encourages one to do something.
- ✓ A payment or concession to stimulate greater output or investment



# Establishing a Routine

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- Step 1: Find a location in the house where homework will be done
- Step 2: Set up a homework center
- Step 3: Establish a homework time
- Step 4: Establish a daily homework schedule



# Establishing a Routine

*Step 1: Find a location in the house where homework will be done*

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- The right location will depend on your child and the culture of your family.
  - Bedroom vs. common space
  - Proximity to parents
- Discuss pros and cons of different settings with your child to arrive at a mutually agreed upon location.
- Benefits of mutual decision?



# Establishing a Routine

## *Step 2: Set up a homework center*

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- Create a home office/homework center in the agreed upon location
  - Large enough to set out all materials needed for completing assignments
- Supply the homework center
  - i.e. pencils, pens, colored markers, rulers, scissors, a dictionary and thesaurus, graph paper, construction paper, glue and cellophane tape, lined paper, a calculator, spell checker, and, depending on the age and needs of your child, a computer or laptop.



# Establishing a Routine

## *Step 2: Set up a homework center*

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# Establishing a Routine

## *Step 2: Set up a homework center*

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- If the homework center is a place that will be used for other things (*such as the dining room table*), then consider keeping the supplies in a portable crate or bin.
- If possible, include a bulletin board that can hold a monthly calendar on which your child can keep track of long-term assignments.
- Allow your child to decorate their space; remain careful of cluttering



# Establishing a Routine

## *Step 3: Establish a homework time*

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- Same time every day
- As with location, the agreed upon time may vary depending on the individual child
- Earlier the better as a general rule to avoid evening fatigue or opportunities for distraction



# Establishing a Routine

## *Step 4: Establish a daily homework schedule*

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- Begin by creating a daily homework schedule with your child
- Review all assignments and check for understanding and needed materials
- If old enough, ask your child to estimate time to complete each assignment
- If possible, determine if parent support is needed before beginning assignments

# Establishing an Incentive System

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- Consider **motivation**
  - Enjoyment of homework? Y/N
  - Good Grades? Y/N
  - If no to both, other rewards may be considered to complete non-preferred tasks
  - How do we learn about motivation?
  - Incentives = bribery?

# Establishing an Incentive System

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Incentive programs fall into two categories:

1. Simple	2. Elaborate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Simplest is reminding the child of a fun activity to do when homework is done</li><li>✓ Verbal and/or visual reminder of natural reward</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ More complex systems which may include a structure for earning tokens toward earning a preferred privilege or reward</li></ul>



# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Simple Incentive Systems*

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- Simplest system is reminding the child of a fun activity to do when homework is done
- First-then language
- Visual support as needed
- Reminders and reinforcement during task
- Reminders ‘spark the engine’ to continue and complete a non-preferred task



# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Elaborate Incentive Systems*

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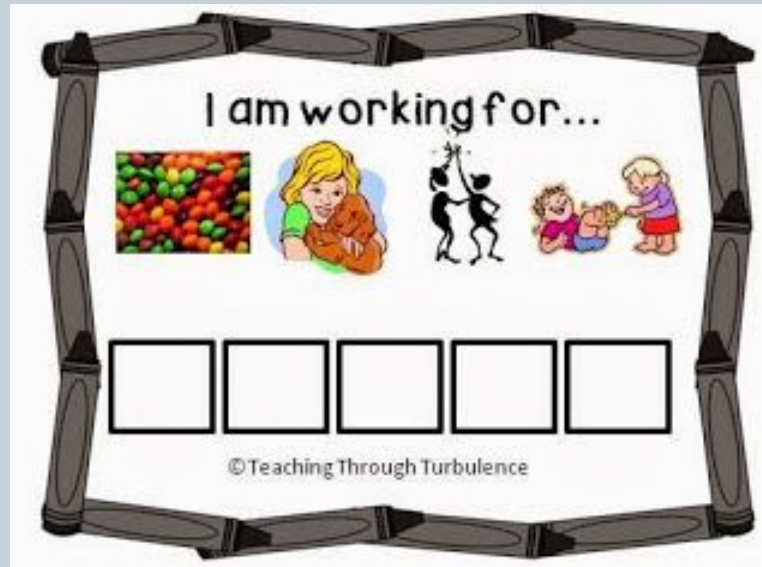
- May be needed to address more significant homework problems
- Token Systems
- Most effective when created with your child
  - Giving children input gives them a sense of control and ownership, making the system more likely to succeed.
  - Children are generally realistic in setting goals and deciding on rewards/consequences when they are involved in the decision-making process (P. Dawson)



# Establishing an Incentive System

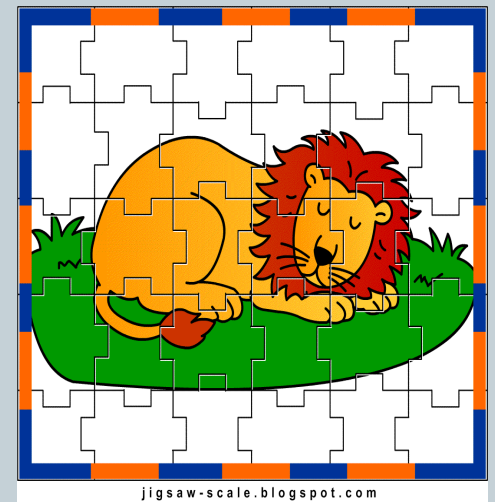
## *Elaborate Incentive Systems*

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MADISON'S TOKEN BOARD						
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I EARN...
<input type="checkbox"/>
I need ____ out of 7 tokens



# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Elaborate Incentive Systems*

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- Build in Breaks
  - When creating the daily homework schedule, identify when breaks will be taken
  - Use of visuals to provide reminders
  - Limit verbal engagement
  - Specific time intervals or following each activity
  - Consistency is key for success
  - Discuss:
    - ✦ How long? What can be done? What if break rules aren't followed?

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Elaborate Incentive Systems*

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- Build in Choice
  - Choice can be incorporated into both the order in which the child agrees to complete assignments and the schedule they will follow to get the work done.
  - Choice in reward
  - Two benefits:
    - ✦ Increase buy-in
    - ✦ Reduces 'power struggles'

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### **Step 1: Describe the Barriers**

- As specifically as possible, jointly determine which behaviors are 'roadblocks' to completing homework
  - Forgetting materials?
  - Organization challenges?
  - Forgetting to write down assignments?
  - Rushing through work?
  - Not rechecking work- resulting in frequent mistakes?
  - Taking too long to complete?
  - Easily distracted during homework time?
  - Forgetting to turn completed work in?

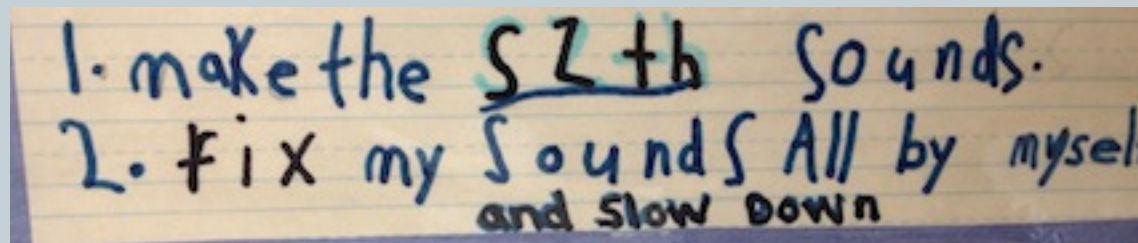
# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### Step 2: Set a Goal

- Goal relates directly to the 'roadblock' behavior.
  - For instance, if not writing down assignments is the problem, the goal might be: "Joe will write down his assignments in his assignment book for every class."
- Visual representation of goal in homework center



# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### Step 2: Set a Goal

NAME:	TERM:	WEEK:
<i>Personal Goals</i>		
This week's Academic goals:		
This week's Thinking / Working goal:		
This week's Friendship goal:		
A Picture Symbol	An Inspiring Word	

I set a goal for myself. I want to

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**I'm in charge of myself so I**

**know I can do it!**

I set a goal for myself. I want to

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**I'm in charge of myself so I**

**know I can do it!**

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### **Step 3: Decide on Possible Rewards and Consequences**

- Menu of rewards based on survey and joint decision
- Only allow feasible options
- Consider use of point (token) system in which points can be earned for the goal behaviors and traded in for the reward the child wants to earn.
  - The bigger the reward, the more points the child will need to earn it.
- The menu should include both larger rewards that may take a week or a month to earn and smaller, inexpensive rewards that can be earned daily

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### **Step 3: Decide on Possible Rewards and Consequences**

- It may also be necessary to build consequences into the system if agreed upon rules are broken.
- Be very careful when assigning consequences in order to keep the plan positive and focused on successes
- Set up for immediate success
  - Increases motivation to continue when discouraged
  - *Diet analogy*
- If more consequences than rewards are earned, revise the program to build confidence and success.





# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### **Step 3: Decide on Possible Rewards and Consequences**

- What should be done if system continues to be ineffective?
- Usually when this kind of system fails, it may be a design failure rather than the failure of the child to respond to rewards.
- If you are having difficulty designing a system that works, consider consulting a specialist, such as a school psychologist or counselor, for assistance.

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### **Step 4. Write a homework contract**

- The contract should say exactly what the child agrees to do and exactly what the parents' roles and responsibilities will be.
- When the contract is in place, it should reduce some of the tension parents and kids often experience around homework.
  - For instance, if part of the contract is that the child will earn a point for not complaining about homework, then if the child does complain, this should not be cause for a battle between parent and child: the child simply does not earn that point.

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### **Step 4. Write a homework contract**

- Praise is important... and fun!
- Verbally praise children for following the contract.
- Types of praise outside of agreed upon rewards?
  - High fives, hug, compliment, sharing success with others in the child's company
- Important: agree to a contract you can live with!
- Avoid consequences that you are either unable or unwilling to impose
  - e.g., if both parents work and are not at home, they cannot monitor whether a child is beginning homework right after school, so an alternative contract may need to be written.
- Follow through is KEY

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### Helpful Reminders

- The incentive system may not work the first time.
- Trial and error is expected. Try it out and redesign the plan to work out kinks.
- Rework: The contract can be rewritten to work on another problem behavior once initial goal is met.
- Not a forever contract:
  - As a long term goal, your child may be willing to drop the use of an incentive system altogether. Write a new contract if your child slips back to previous habits.
- Talk about when the contract will end and why
  - Avoid disappearing acts



# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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### **Involving Siblings: “But that’s not fair!”**

- Set up a similar system for other children with appropriate goals
- Make a more informal arrangement by promising to do something special from time to time with the other children in the family so they do not feel left out
- Have the child earn rewards that benefit the whole family (e.g., eating out at a favorite restaurant or going to a movie).

# Establishing an Incentive System

## *Developing Incentive Systems*

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**Involving Siblings: “But that’s not fair!”**



# Final Thoughts and Further Support

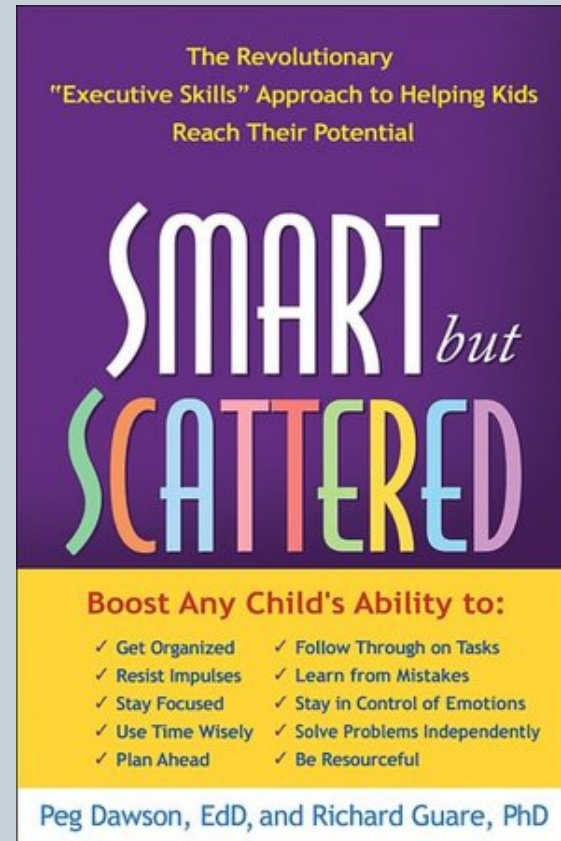
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- Suggestions should be adapted to the developmental or chronological age of your child
- Determining acceptable levels of parental support
- According to P. Dawson, middle school is often the turning point, and parents will need to make decisions about how involved to be in homework based on the developmental level of their children.
  - Time of highest mismatch between expectation and ability
- Ongoing challenges?

# Resources for Parents

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- Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary “Executive Skills” Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential. *Peg Dawson, EdD and Richard Guare, PhD.*
- Helping Children with ADHD: Top 10 strategies for Parents handout





# References

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