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#10667
GETTING ORGANIZED / WORK HABITS

WGBH, 2000
Grade Level: 13+
50 Minutes

CAPTIONED MEDIA PROGRAM RELATED RESOURCES

#3327 YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS
#3666 STUDENT WORKSHOP: STUDY SKILLS
#9234 HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL: STRATEGIES AND GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AD/HD AND LEARNING DISABILITIES
#9539 HOW TO TEACH STUDY SKILLS

Funding for the Captioned Media Program is provided by the U.S. Department of Education

About the Developing Minds Video Library

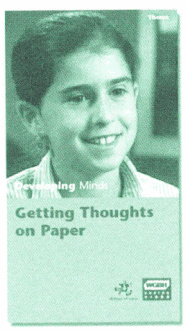
The *Developing Minds* multimedia library features the work of All Kinds of Minds, a private non-profit Institute, affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. All Kinds of Minds offers a broad range of programs and resources that enable parents, educators, and clinicians to help children and adolescents with differences in learning achieve success in school and life. The Institute was co-founded by Dr. Mel Levine, who for more than 25 years has pioneered innovative programs to enhance the understanding and management of students' learning difficulties. Dr. Levine's comprehensive neurodevelopmental model draws on research from a wide range of disciplines. A renowned developmental-behavioral pediatrician, Dr. Levine is also Professor of Pediatrics at the University of North Carolina Medical School and Director of the University's Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning.

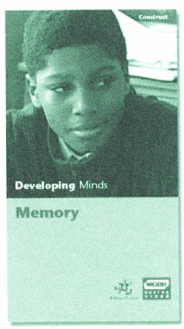
all kinds of minds

Developing Minds is a library of 22 videotapes with accompanying guides. The library is designed to help parents and teachers of elementary and middle-school children explore differences in learning through the approach and conceptual framework of developmental-behavioral pediatrician, author, and professor Dr. Mel Levine.

The heart of the collection, which features children and early adolescents with diverse learning profiles, is divided into *theme* and *construct* videos. The eight theme videos focus on children's struggles and successes with skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics as well as difficulties in communication, understanding, organization, feelings, and behavior. The eight construct videos begin where the theme videos end, illuminating breakdowns in such key areas of brain function as attention, memory, language, neuromotor, social cognition, temporal-sequential ordering, spatial ordering, and higher order cognition.

Dr. Levine guides viewers through the videos as he and other experts, teachers, parents, and children provide commentary and strategies. Together, the videos and print guides promote an understanding of learning differences—strengths and weaknesses—and strategies that help children become successful learners. This material also gives parents and teachers a common language to advance effective communication between home and school.





Theme Videos

Present the learning problems and successes of children and early adolescents (40–60 minutes each)

- Mastering the Challenge of Reading
- Getting Thoughts on Paper
- Thinking with Numbers
- Understanding
- Student Output: Producing, Performing, and Communicating
- Getting Organized/Work Habits
- Feelings and Motivation
- Behavioral Complications

Construct Videos

Provide deeper insight into specific neurodevelopmental breakdowns that contribute to differences in learning (30–60 minutes each)

- Attention
- Language
- Neuromotor Function
- Memory
- Social Cognition
- Temporal-Sequential Ordering
- Spatial Ordering
- Higher Order Cognition

How to Use

Together, this video and guide can be used to increase awareness and gain a deeper understanding of children's difficulties with organization and work habits in school and at home. The video is divided into three segments: Observations, Teacher Strategies, and Parent Strategies. Observations features home and classroom scenes of children struggling with different aspects of organization—time management, managing materials and space, and strategic planning. Teacher Strategies and Parent Strategies provide practical suggestions from Dr. Mel Levine, other experts, teachers, parents, and the children themselves to help children address a variety of organizational problems.

The structure of the guide is similar to the videos, with sections on Observations, Teacher Strategies, and Parent Strategies. In addition, the guide provides a glossary of terms used in the video, a checklist of signs of organizational problems, a brief background article on organization, and resources for further information.

There are many ways to use these materials, including watching the video alone, working with a partner, participating in a teacher or parent study group, or using the video and guide at a parent-teacher association gathering. However you choose to use them, these materials will provide insight into important difficulties that children experience with organization. The Viewing Tips on page 6 offer key questions to reflect upon after watching.

Tips for Using

- Scan the guide and read the introduction and background article. Watch the entire video, then rewatch it, using sections of the guide to reinforce what you see.
- To find information that addresses your needs, go directly to a particular section of the guide, such as Explore the Video, then view related video segments—or refer to the guide alone.
- Begin exploring the video library with ***Getting Organized/Work Habits*** for an overview of the topic. Then watch related construct tapes, such as ***Attention, Memory, Spatial Ordering, Temporal-Sequential Ordering,*** and ***Higher Order Cognition*** for information on key neurodevelopmental functions that affect organization.

Management by Profile Videos
Introduce a systematic process for developing an individualized educational path based on a child's neurodevelopmental strengths and weaknesses; *A Student Profile* showcases a child as he moves through the process (20–30 minutes each)

- Strategies for Parents
- Strategies for Teachers
- A Student Profile

Introduction Videos
Provide a brief description of the video library components; the Parents' and Teachers' videos also introduce the philosophy and approach of Dr. Mel Levine (10–20 minutes each)

- Video Library Overview
- Introduction for Parents
- Introduction for Teachers

Introduction

"I've realized that if I'm not organized . . . I can lose things easily. And if I don't remember something, I won't be able to look it up and find it."

—Mackenzie,
fifth grade student

Many adults may remember being graded in elementary school for work habits. A satisfactory mark usually reflected keeping a clean and orderly desk, turning assignments in on schedule, and arriving at school on time. If adults were graded for work habits, similar factors might be maintaining a neat home or office, paying bills on schedule, being on time for meetings, or planning a family outing from start to finish.

Good organizational skills are at the core of school and life success. Children who develop good organizational skills and maintain good work habits are more confident learners—they know what needs to be learned and they know how to go about learning it. Children who are organized approach new tasks and activities in a strategic manner. When given a task, they focus on the requirements of the activity. Before beginning, they may clear their work space and think about how they will complete the activity, taking into account deadlines, work schedules, and any materials they may need to use.

"I just put [homework] inside a bag and leave the bag open. So if it falls out or gets misplaced, that's being disorganized."

—Manuel,
seventh grade student

Children who lack organizational skills typically become frustrated and bogged down with their school work. Assignments may take too long to complete and important study materials often get misplaced. Parents, teachers, and the children themselves share the frustration, not understanding how a child who is capable of learning so much—and who seems to have such a solid grasp of ideas—can appear to be so disorganized. Dr. Mel Levine emphasizes that, "We have to recognize that organizational problems are serious and that they are not the fault of a child . . . and sometimes [they're] even more of an obstacle than a delay in one of the more traditional academic skills. . . . I would argue that to have an organizational problem is much more serious than having a spelling problem."

Dr. Levine is among a group of researchers who have examined the neurodevelopmental underpinnings of organization. Research indicates that different brain functions—including attention, memory, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, and higher order cognition—underlie organizational skills. Some organizational difficulties may relate to weaknesses in one or more functions, making it hard for some students to keep track of time; be attentive to details; arrange information, events, or objects in the right order; or approach learning or studying in a strategic manner.

Like academic skills, organization and study strategies can be learned. Helping children become more organized and better at studying involves teaching them how to plan and how to manage time, materials, and space as part of their daily routines.

Time Management

Time management—the ability to use time efficiently—is a primary component of organization. Meeting deadlines, knowing when to study for a test, getting from class to class on time, and arriving home by curfew are all examples of how children and early adolescents must manage their time on a daily basis. Time management requires an awareness of time—of time intervals and the passage of time. It also assumes an ability to estimate time, such as the amount of time it takes to complete a task.

Children who struggle with a basic awareness of time may have difficulty with time allocation. For example, they may not think about time nor use time to structure their tasks and their efforts. As projects become more complex, children may find it increasingly hard to pace themselves, deal with impending deadlines, or be strategic in their planning in order to complete the assignment.

"Organizational skills are tools for getting the job done. Just like a carpenter or a plumber would not think of going on the job without a satchel of the right tools . . . our kids should not be going to school without the right bag of tools and some basic coursework on how to be a student."

— Joan Sedita, M.Ed.
Educational Consultant

Managing Materials and Space

An important part of organization is having everything necessary—pencils, paper, books, sports gear, musical instruments—readily accessible in the work space. Materials management is the ability to deal with the equipment and tools needed to complete tasks.

Children who have difficulty managing materials and space may misplace objects. This can result in their spending a great deal of time looking for misplaced items in order to start or finish their work.

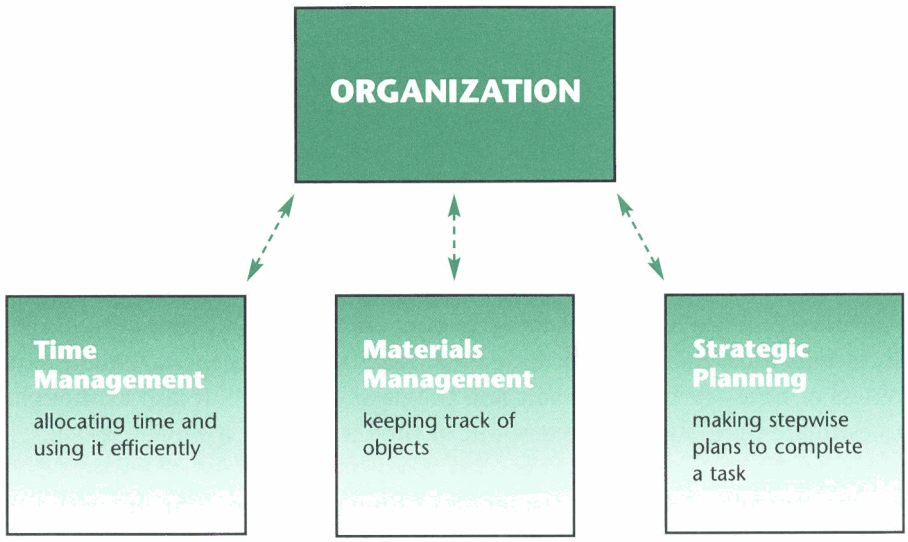
Strategic Planning

Throughout the day, children are presented with many tasks that require planning—an approach that makes a task easier to accomplish. Without a plan, working on a task is likely to be a disorganized and random process. For some children, however, developing a plan of action can be a challenge. First, they must decide how to get started. Next, they need to think through how they will complete the task, deciding what they will do first, second, and so forth.

Helping children think about strategies before beginning a task may enable them to do the task more efficiently and effectively. Having children create a memory plan for how they will study for an exam—what strategies they will use, how much time they will allot, their study schedule—is an example of strategic planning.

Organizational Skills Diagram

This diagram offers a graphic representation of the organizational skills presented in the video.



Viewing Aids

The **Glossary** and **Signs of Organizational Problems** explain concepts presented in the video. Refer to them while you view the video or afterward when thinking about how you might help a particular child.

Glossary

accommodations: adjustments to tasks that work around a child's neurodevelopmental differences or weak skills; sometimes referred to as bypass strategies

attention: brain functions related to having the mental energy needed for learning and behavior, processing information, and regulating what you say and do

demystification: the process of helping children understand—and have the terms necessary for coping with—their learning strengths and weaknesses

dysfunction: weakness in any neurodevelopmental process, for example, not having enough mental energy to complete a task

materials management: organizing the various materials, tools, and equipment needed for school, work, or home activities

mental effort: initiating and maintaining the flow of mental energy needed to start and complete assignments and tasks

metacognition: thinking about one's own thinking; for example, focusing not only on what you have to learn, but how you are going to understand it

neurodevelopmental functions: brain-based processes needed to acquire and produce knowledge, skills, and approaches to learning

pacing: doing things at the appropriate speed—neither too slowly nor too quickly

sequencing: the ability to arrange information, events, or objects in the right order

spatial ordering: the ability to deal with information that is arranged in a certain way, such as a pattern; for example, having a well organized notebook in which papers can be easily located

temporal-sequential ordering: the ability to appreciate, store, and use information in a specific order; for example, the individual knows what to do, when to do it, and does so on schedule

time management: using time efficiently; for example, meeting deadlines

Signs of Organizational Problems

Overall
- appears to lack good work habits
- has problems completing multistep tasks

Time Management
- races through work or accomplishes tasks too slowly
- is often tardy
- doesn't make deadlines or seem to realize when running behind schedule
- cannot estimate how much time a task will take to complete
- has difficulty staying on task

Managing Materials and Space
- keeps a messy workspace (e.g., desk, notebook)
- loses things often; spends too much time looking for misplaced items
- seldom has what he or she needs for a task (e.g., pencil or pen)
- does not bring home what is needed to complete homework (e.g., books, assignments)

Strategic Planning
- has trouble getting started with assignments or starts projects impulsively
- does not think about the steps needed to complete a task
- rarely thinks about the best way to complete a task

Explore the Video

Viewing Tips

- Watch the entire video to get a sense of the concepts and issues presented. Then rewatch the parts that interest you.
- View the video with a partner or in a small group, and discuss it. Consider the following questions: *How might problems with attention, memory, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, or higher order cognition affect a child's organizational skills? Which strategies are effective for helping students become better organized? Are there any strategies you might want to try?*
- Watch the video with a child who has similar learning difficulties, then discuss reactions. Have siblings watch the video to gain understanding of their brother's or sister's difficulty with organization.

Observations

Go to these scenes to reinforce what you see in the video or to focus your discussion.

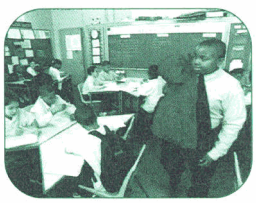
Time Management

1. Fifth grade teacher Ms. McClain realizes Gideon puts great effort into his assignments and understands rules like punctuation, but his organizational difficulties keep him from submitting complete work.

She describes being "stumped" by his:

- walking into class late in the morning, dropping things as he goes
- having items constantly falling out of his locker and out of his desk
- forgetting to put his name on his papers
- writing entire pages without inserting any punctuation

2. Karl is often late to his sixth grade class. He expresses frustration at getting confused about time.

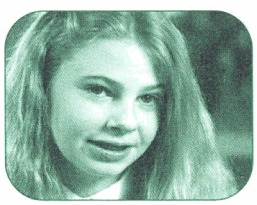


His teacher describes Karl as:

- taking a lot of time to collect his materials at the end of a class
- engaging in a variety of activities (talking to the teacher, looking at classroom displays) when he should be moving to the next class
- becoming frazzled when he arrives late

Managing Materials and Space

1. MacKenzie, a fifth grade student, reports her difficulty organizing materials.



She describes:

- not being an organized person
- usually stuffing things in her desk
- losing things easily
- being unable to find things that are misplaced

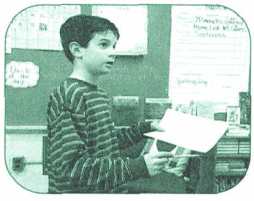
2. Completing homework is difficult for Manuel, a seventh grader who is generally a good student in the classroom.

He reports:

- throwing his homework in a book bag
- not paying attention if the homework falls out of the book bag
- misplacing homework

Strategic Planning

1. Brian, a third grader, has difficulty with academic activities containing multiple parts.



His teacher observes that when Brian tries to process multistep directions or even a discussion, he:

- is impulsive about what he says as a response
- will raise his hand to feel part of the group without remembering what it was he wanted to say

2. Fifth-grader Ben often does things too quickly without planning ahead, possibly as a result of his weak attention controls.

He explains how he:

- "tunes out" when he is not interested
- fidgets and squirms in his chair

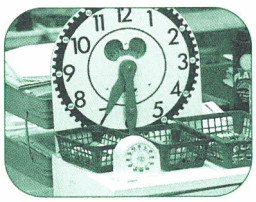
"[Organization] frees kids up to do the sophisticated thinking, the problem-solving, the creative activity that can make school most rewarding. . . . Without organizational skills, you can really get bogged down . . . in a sense, you are being forced to do everything the hard way."

—Dr. Mel Levine

Teacher Strategies

The techniques used by teachers in these scenes can reinforce what you see in the video or focus your discussion.

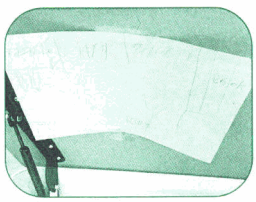
1. Ms. Jones introduces time management practices to all of her third grade students.



Her methods include:

- using a timer to alert students that it's time to move on to the next activity
- letting the timer structure time for students who are working independently, freeing her to work with a small group

2. Third grade teacher Ms. Klimaszewski helps Andrew organize materials in his desk.



She describes:

- asking Andrew to draw a map of what his desk should look like inside
- cueing Andrew to look at his map before looking inside his desk for something
- letting other children use the technique

"The key term when you think about organization and study skills is metacognition. And simply put, metacognition means thinking about thinking. So you are focusing not only on what you have to learn, but how you're going to learn it."

—Joan Sedita
Educational Consultant

3. Sixth grade teacher Ms. Jensen helps her class plan strategies for completing a math assignment.

She encourages their planning by:

- inviting the class to discuss and demonstrate different strategies
- asking students to compare strategies and select the best ones
- sharing with the children why organizational strategies can help make the work easier

Parent Strategies

The techniques used by parents in these scenes can reinforce what you see in the video or focus your discussion.

1. Nick's parents share how planning to get chores completed is part of being a responsible family member—and how they've shown Nick ways to isolate the different components of his duties.

For example, with laundry he:

- sorts clothes into a basket for colors and one for whites
- makes sure the baskets are in the laundry room each Sunday morning
- understands that his clothes don't get washed if he hasn't been responsible about the chore

"Invariably, [our daughter] will come home and not have the right folder or notebook. We tried a number of things that didn't work and finally, she decided that what she would do is bring all the folders and all the notebooks home every night and back to school every morning."

—Parent

2. Parents in the video describe a variety of ways to improve time management.

Their methods include:

- using a weekly calendar to keep track of homework assignments
- asking children to plan what day they are going to do which part of their homework
- helping children estimate and allocate time for longer tasks
- posting a calendar of activities

3. Parents in the video also describe a variety of things to encourage their children to better manage materials.

Their ideas include:

- letting the child try several strategies before he or she decides on the best one
- requesting that children bring home all school materials (notebooks, books, folders) each night and return all of them the next day
- providing book bags
- making sure all materials (pencils, paper, dictionary) are available in the homework area before the child starts to work
- having children use daily planners that include a section for each subject area
- having children participate in making lists for doing errands

Home and School Collaboration

"If a child is having trouble in reading or writing or math, we're very sympathetic. . . . Teachers and parents can understand it and kind of share grief. . . . but if a kid is disorganized, we blame the child. We assume . . . that he's not meeting deadlines because he is resistant or he has some kind of behavior problem. . . . That's a mistake [because] organizational problems are serious and not the fault of the child."

—Dr. Mel Levine

Living with or teaching a child who has organizational problems can be an emotionally charged experience. Frustration and confusion can complicate the conversation between parents and teachers about what to do. Respect for each other and open communication can reduce tension and enable parents and teachers to benefit from each other's expertise and knowledge of the child from different perspectives. Working together, parents, teachers, and the children themselves can inform one another how to best address the child's needs.

Parents and Teachers Communicating about Organizational Skills and Work Habits

When you suspect an organizational problem, schedule a parent-teacher meeting to share information about the child. The following "talking points" can help structure the discussion.

Share observations of the child's organizational profile and discuss where the breakdown is occurring. What are the worries or concerns? Is the breakdown in one organizational component, but not in others? Do difficulties in attention, memory, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, or higher order cognition seem to affect the child's organizational skills? Does the child have similar organizational problems at home and at school?

Identify and discuss the child's strengths and interests. How can they be used to enhance his or her organizational skills and motivation to complete tasks? Can parents put their child in charge of planning the itinerary for a day at an amusement park? Can the teacher use the child's love of baseball card collecting as a foundation for developing filing skills?

Discuss possible strategies. What have you tried that has been successful or not so successful? Are there other ideas that might work? Are there strategies that work both at school and at home, such as using a timer to monitor time spent on a task or activity?

Acknowledge emotional reactions to the situation. Discuss how children who experience frustration or failure as a result of being disorganized may become so fearful that they give up. Some children may then turn their energy to acting out. Share strategies to help the child cope.

Discuss appropriate next steps. Establish a plan for ongoing discussion and problem solving. Should specialists be consulted? Does the school have a study skills class? How can you best advocate for the child?

When an organizational problem has been specified:

- Learn more about organizational skills from other experts, reference books, and Web sites. (See Resources beginning on page 20.)
- Seek assistance from colleagues and experienced parents, professional organizations, and support groups.
- Request that the school's special education teacher or learning specialist observe the child, then consult with you on strategies to use both in the classroom and at home.
- Investigate the availability of professional help from a tutor, pediatrician, or others.

Talking with Children about Their Strengths and Weaknesses

"In the adult world, what really counts is how strong your strengths are, not how weak your weaknesses are." **—Dr. Mel Levine**

Moments of frustration as well as pride are common for children with organizational problems and for the adults who work with them. Some children give up and see themselves as failures; others exhibit behavior complications that relate to their difficulties with organization. Dr. Levine suggests using a process called demystification, which, through open discussion with supportive adults, helps children learn to put borders around their differences and understand that, like everyone else, they have strengths and weaknesses. This process creates a shared sense of optimism that the child and adult are working toward a common goal, and that learning problems can be successfully managed. The following suggestions can help you demystify children's difficulties with organization.

Eliminate any stigma. Empathy can reduce children's frustration and anxiety about their organizational problems. Emphasize that no one is to blame, and that you know that often they need to work harder than others to plan their work and to manage time, materials, and their work space. Explain that everyone has differences in the way they learn and demonstrate their learning. Reassure children that you will help them find ways that work for them. Share an anecdote about how you handled a learning problem or an embarrassing mistake that stemmed from being disorganized.

Discuss strengths and interests. Help children find their strengths. Use concrete examples, but avoid false praise. To a child who describes a novel well, you might say, "I like the way you remembered details that show how funny the story was." Identify books, videos, Web sites, or places in the community that can help children build on their strengths and interests.

Discuss areas of weakness. Use plain language to explain what aspect of organization is difficult for the child. Use concrete examples, such as, "You may not be able to find your catcher's mitt in your closet because you have difficulty organizing your clothes and equipment so that you can see and reach everything in the closet."

Emphasize optimism. Help children realize that they can improve—they can work on their weaknesses and make their strengths stronger. Point out future possibilities for success given their current strengths. Help children build a sense of control over their learning by encouraging them to feel accountable for their own progress. A child with difficulty organizing his or her notebook who learns to use dividers can become responsible for using this organizational strategy.

Identify an ally. Help children locate a mentor—a favorite teacher, a coach, or a neighbor—who will work with and support them. Explain that children can help themselves by sharing with others how they learn best. Older children can explain the strategies that work for them while younger ones may need adult support. Encourage children to be active partners with their allies.

Protect from humiliation. Help children strengthen self-esteem and maintain pride by protecting them from public humiliation related to their learning differences. Always avoid criticizing children in public and protect them from embarrassment in front of siblings and classmates. For example, don't ask a child who has difficulty managing materials to share a locker with a peer who is neat.

Management by Profile

Demystification—helping children understand their neurodevelopmental strengths and weaknesses—is part of Management by Profile, a process developed by Dr. Levine and All Kinds of Minds for managing the education of children with differences in learning. Teachers, parents, and the children themselves participate in developing a learning plan for the child that includes strengthening of strengths, accommodations, interventions at the break-down points, and protection from humiliation.

For more information on Management by Profile, see the Management by Profile guide and the videos, *Strategies for Parents, Strategies for Teachers,* and *A Student Profile.*

Strategies to Try

Strategy Tips

Decide which strategies to try by observing the child and identifying the ways in which he or she learns best.

- It may take several attempts to see positive results from one strategy. Don't give up too soon.
- If the first few strategies you try do not improve the child's skills, try others.
- Most of these strategies can be adapted for use with different age groups.

You may use the strategies on the following pages to help children who are experiencing problems with organization and work habits. Many of these are accommodations—alternate approaches that work around a child's differences—for example, using checklists to help children stay on task. Other strategies are designed to specifically strengthen a weakness, such as creating a reference map of what a neat desk looks like. From the strategies suggested below, select those that you and the child think might work best.

General

Teach children to become organized. Provide instruction in managing time and materials beginning in the early grades and continue throughout their school experience. Help children apply these skills to all subjects and situations.

Develop a consistent organizational approach. Decide on an approach for managing time, materials, or space and then use it for all tasks and activities. Work towards agreement with others. For example, all teachers on a grade level team agree on one approach for organizing notebooks for the entire school year. Then teach the approach to the children and inform parents.

Become an organizational ally. Be supportive and provide accommodations as needed. Refrain from criticizing. For example, stay in the room with the child as she works in order to offer organizational support as needed.

Have children keep assignment books. Make sure the book has ample space for listing assignments, due dates, and materials needed. Leave a space for parents to sign, acknowledging that they have reviewed the assignment. Include a section which states estimated and actual time to complete the assignment.

Turn over responsibility to the child. Once an accommodation for an organizational difficulty has been identified, gradually make the child responsible for his own progress or task completion. For example, expect the child to set his alarm clock at night; only wash the clothes that are properly placed in the designated hamper.

Use household chores to teach children organizational skills. Give children specific responsibilities they can complete to contribute to the household. Make completing these chores a routine. For instance, before a child leaves for school, she must make the bed, walk the dog, etc.

Use electronic devices. Consider using tools such as electronic watches that have built-in alarms or electronic datebooks for organizing information.

Encourage children to think about thinking. For example, teach them how the brain functions. Encourage children to identify strengths and weaknesses in their organization and study skills.

Time Management

Post a daily itinerary. Go over it in the morning. Refer to the itinerary or agenda throughout the day and teach children to anticipate what's next.

Use a timer during activities. Ask the child to estimate how much time a task will take to complete and then set the timer. Make sure the child does not try to "beat the clock," but rather uses the allotted time efficiently and effectively.

Check work in progress. For long assignments such as reports, check on progress at quarterly intervals. If an assignment that is given on Monday is due on Friday, ask the child to show you what he or she has completed on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, or show you a plan of what will be done on each of the days.

Help children understand timeframes for completing work. Engage children in developing their own schedules for the day and week. At the end of the school day, or at home in the evening, review the day's accomplishments with respect to the schedule. Consider using a form that the child checks off.

Increase children's accuracy with estimating time. Review the child's calendar and accomplishments with her. Ask questions such as, "Did the task take more or less time than you thought it would?"

Heighten awareness of deadlines. If an assignment is due on Friday, prompt children to think about how much time they have left with questions such as, "Your book report is due next Friday and today is Monday. How many evenings do you have left to work before your report is due? What do you need to get done in that time?"

Show children how to pace themselves. Before beginning a task, ask children to estimate how much time they think it will take to complete it. Have them allocate time for each step. Encourage them to monitor themselves.

Prepare for upcoming transitions. When children have trouble with transitions, reduce the number of decisions they need to make. For example, if morning transitions (e.g., getting up, dressed, and to the bus stop) are difficult, prepare the night before by asking the child to decide what he wants to wear and laying out his clothes.

Let children plan the events for a certain timeframe. Allow children to plan an itinerary for a family outing or organize the sequence when doing errands. Or, in the classroom, let them plan how they will spend their time at high-interest learning centers.

Set a consistent time each day for completing certain tasks. When children know an activity will occur at the same time each day they are more likely to be prepared for it. For example, set the same time each night for children to complete homework. At school, sequence subject areas consistently, such as reserving the first hour of each day for language arts and the next hour for math.

Adapt timeframes to children's individual preferences. Break a task into parts and let children complete those that are easiest and take the least time first. If an assignment requires a long time period, let the child take a break after a designated time (e.g., after 15 or 20 minutes) to prevent getting bogged down.

"I think kids should not only be taught organizational skills, they [also] should be taught about time management and materials management. . . . and they should be taught how different brain functions contribute to these organizational skills."

—Dr. Mel Levine

Do not allow children to spend more time on a task than necessary. Assign a timeframe to each step of a major task. For example, allow five minutes for brainstorming or five minutes for reflection. Suggest spending only four minutes on a math problem before moving on to the next one.

Help children prioritize "to do" lists. Talk with children about the importance of sequencing tasks and judging which tasks are of highest priority.

Provide opportunities for children to serve as time managers. Give children the opportunity to develop and monitor activity schedules. Arrange cooperative groups in which children can practice being time managers for the group.

Managing Materials and Space

Assign homework buddies. Have peers check one another's assignment notebooks or backpacks at the end of the day. These children could even exchange phone numbers or e-mail addresses. Try to pair a well-organized child with a child who experiences organizational difficulties.

Give children systematic ways to keep track of their materials. Teach the child a routine for putting things away. For example, when coming in from the playground, immediately put your sports gear in the designated bin. Before leaving home for school, check the items in your book bag against the posted list on the refrigerator door.

Provide children with a standard way to organize notebooks. Teach children how to set up and use an assignment notebook. Include a calendar and pencil holder in it. Create a model of a notebook that shows where everything goes. Teach children how to use dividers and organize papers in sections (e.g., homework, notes, quizzes, and tests). Periodically remind them to clean out their notebooks, throwing away papers they no longer need and reorganizing others if necessary.

Elements of a master notebook include:

- table of contents or checklist of what is in the notebook
- three-hole punched paper
- sections for each subject area, with subsections (e.g., homework, vocabulary, tests and quizzes, study notes)
- a monthly calendar with ample space for notes
- holder for pencils, erasers, highlighters, and other tools
- portable three-hole punch

Guide children in using desk organizers. Provide containers for different items, such as pencils, erasers, and paper clips. Make available clothes hampers, toy boxes, and files.

Teach children that there is a place for everything. Assign drawers and shelves to specific items. Post labels identifying what goes where.

Use reminders. Make available checklists and how-to sheets for tasks. As the child becomes more familiar with the list, encourage her to memorize it.

Ask children to draw a map or an outline of what their desk should look like on the inside. Encourage them to use the map mid-day to reorganize their desks as needed.

Show children how to use book bags. Some children may need to keep everything in their book bag. To ensure that all materials are available for homework assignments, they may need to bring home all books and folders routinely. Their book bags should be cleaned out regularly, however.

Provide children with the tools they need to complete an assignment. Reduce the child's need to locate materials by making them available to the child. For example, parents can have pencils, paper, a dictionary, and other materials for the child in the homework area.

Designate a working notebook and a reserve notebook. Have the child keep only what she currently needs for an assignment in the working notebook. Periodically, ask the child to go through the working notebook and remove those items that either need to be discarded or placed in the reserve notebook for safekeeping.

Use three-hole punched paper. When working with a notebook system, it is important to use three-hole punched paper or to have hole punchers available. Require that all papers turned in for grades should be three-hole punched, so that they can eventually be stored in a binder. Encourage children not to use envelopes or pockets in their notebooks for storing papers.

Establish a study area. In classrooms and at home, make sure there are areas free from distractions (e.g., quiet, good lighting, comfortable) and conducive to working. Have necessary supplies available in this area.

Strategic Planning

Help children manage multistep tasks. For example, encourage them to visualize themselves completing each step.

Ask children to create study plans. Before studying for an exam, ask the child to think about the best way to study for it and to identify strategies that may be helpful.

Prepare work plans for assignments. Show children how to create a sketch, a brief summary, or an outline to use as a work plan before beginning an assignment.

Demonstrate your thinking. It is not enough that children see the steps, they also should see and hear how people think as they move through the steps of completing a task—think aloud as you perform a task.

Use checklists to help children organize their work and stay on task. Give children a clear sequence of steps on the checklist. Teach children a strategy for using the checklist, such as, "Read Step 1 aloud, do the step, then read Step 2," etc. For younger children, use pictures or icons and have them mark each as they complete the steps.

Teach children to preview. Help them get started on assignments by encouraging them to think ahead of time about what the completed assignment will look like, or what they will do in the assignment. Have children make a list of materials they will need to write their report. Have them outline what information they will include in their story.

Have children repeat directions aloud before beginning a task. Provide opportunities for children to summarize and paraphrase instructions.

"I think the concept of teaching children how they learn, how they go about doing things, is just as important as what they have to learn."

—Joan Sedita, M.Ed
Educational Consultant

Break projects into smaller steps or components. Talk through each step with the child. For example, most projects have specific start-up steps—such as getting materials, organizing the work space, identifying an idea, and making a plan—which should be stated. Remind children to finish each step before moving on.

Help children sequence the parts of a task or an assignment. Once children have identified the parts of a task, have them discuss the order in which they will complete the parts. Draw a flow chart or sketch to aid understanding.

Ask children to think about ways they approached similar assignments. As part of the planning process, have children recall strategies that helped them be successful on past assignments. For example, if they are studying for a science test, ask them to think about the last time they did well on a test and describe how they prepared for it. Help children transfer the strategy to appropriate situations.

Help children break down long-term activities. For example, a history report may be broken down into the following steps: Monday, go to the library and gather sources; Tuesday, read the resources and take notes; Wednesday, write the first draft; Thursday, proofread and revise final copy; and Friday, take to school and turn in report.

For more strategies to address weaknesses in organizational skills, refer to the *Attention, Spatial Ordering, Temporal-Sequential Ordering,* and *Higher Order Cognition* videos and guides in this library.

Background on Getting Organized/Work Habits

In schools, students are bombarded with information and materials they are expected to remember, build upon, and organize. Some students seem to be innately well organized. They plan ahead and have a strategic approach to learning and completing tasks. These children easily develop the organizational skills that help them figure out main ideas, take good notes, study effectively for tests, and do homework in a well-paced, methodical way.

Students with learning differences often have difficulty meeting the organizational and study demands of school. Even skills that teachers and parents may assume children possess, such as keeping track of time or bringing the right materials to class, may not be fine-tuned. Consider the example of a teenager who, on March 30, thought he had a full month to finish an assignment due on April 3 because he knew that April was the next month.

While teachers provide subject matter knowledge, few explicitly teach students the organizational and study skills necessary to succeed in school. When children do not know how to manage their homework or plan projects, it can be frustrating for teachers, parents, and the children themselves.

Dr. Mel Levine, of All Kinds of Minds, uses a neurodevelopmental approach to organization and study skills. Problems in one or more areas of brain function, such as attention, memory, language, temporal-sequential ordering, or higher order cognition, can affect children's ability to organize themselves.

Children who do not develop strong organizational skills in elementary school, may have a tough time in middle school where they are expected to keep track of multiple assignments, classes, and after-school activities. High school is even more complicated, with students expected to use sophisticated study and organizational skills to complete long-term assignments.

Dr. Levine stresses that children with learning problems need specific instruction and practice to succeed in classrooms and at home. Joan Sedita, an expert on organizational skills and study strategies says, "Just as a carpenter needs the right tools (such as a saw and hammer) and basic skills (such as how to measure and cut wood) to frame a house, students need the right tools (such as notebooks and assignments pads) and basic study skills (such as reading and notetaking skills) to be successful in school."

Sedita breaks down organizational and study skills into two categories: organizing materials and organizing information. For organizing materials, she recommends using a Master Notebook System, which includes a working notebook to keep current work, a reserve notebook for storing papers from previous work, a daily assignment book to note homework, and a monthly calendar for tracking long-term assignments. Students may also benefit from keeping a reference binder that they fill with helpful information, such as words they have difficulty spelling. Alternatively, color-coded subject notebooks can make it easier for students to remember which book should be brought to each class.

For organizing information, Sedita believes that main idea skills, notetaking, and summarizing skills are the three keys to being an active reader, listener, and processor of information. The ability to recognize a main idea and put it into one's own words is the most important

Helping Children Manage Materials

- Teach children how to prompt themselves to remember materials. For example, suggest that they write reminder notes and place them where they will see them—on a mirror, bedroom stand, or inside the door of their home.
- Regularly go through notebooks with children to get rid of unnecessary papers, reorganize notes, or keep track of materials needed for class.
- Have students keep an assignment pad listing what they need to do for homework, study for a test, etc. These lists should be checked regularly by the teacher and parent.
- Start a recorded school telephone line for children and parents to check homework directions, when assignments are due, or what materials are needed for class projects.
- Reinforce oral directions for assignments by writing information on the board or providing a handout.

basic study skill for children because so many other advanced study skills are built upon it. Many children have trouble "chunking," or sorting information. They become overwhelmed by the details.

Sedita recommends several strategies to help children identify main ideas. When a paragraph includes a topic sentence, it can be underlined or highlighted as the main idea. For paragraphs where the main idea must be inferred, words that are often repeated can provide clues to the main idea which then can be written in the margin. Sedita suggests that children take notes using two-columns—listing main ideas in the left column and supporting details in the right column. This notetaking, along with student written summaries, will help students be more active learners of material, resulting in improved long-term memory.

Dr. Charles T. Mangrum II, a University of Miami professor, and Dr. Stephen Strichart, a Florida International University professor, have also written extensively on how to promote children's organization and study skills. Drs. Mangrum and Strichart give students specific strategies to help them remember material, write research papers, or take tests. They suggest techniques like trying to rhyme material to remember it. They also show students how to properly use reference materials, such as a dictionary or even a weather map. Students learn how using weekly or daily planners can help them allocate their time among different subject areas. They also learn how to find the best studying place and atmosphere—and ensure it is available to them when they need it.

In collaboratation with Patricia Iannuzzi, a specialist in information literacy at the University of California at Berkeley, Mangrum and Strichart suggest teaching students how to determine when information is needed and how best to locate, evaluate, and use it. Traditionally, students have been taught specific skills for finding information, such as using out of print books, but these skills were taught in isolation. Often, students had difficulty applying them to an actual research project. One example of teaching information literacy is having students pick their own debate topic, then, with the help of a teacher, gather, evaluate, and synthesize information about it.

Many strategies like the one above have been developed to help children work around issues related to organization and studying. Some of these strategies focus on staging, or breaking down complex tasks into "smaller, shorter, or less complex mini-tasks." Books, Web sites, and tutoring programs have been developed to teach students of all ages fundamental study strategies and organizational skills. These resources can enable children and young adolescents to become independent learners by helping them figure out what works best for them.

Dr. Levine points out that among the numerous organizational strategies available, not every one is right for each child. Teachers and parents need to work with children to find the strategies that work best for the individual. Levine is convinced that students will be more successful in school when they are given the organizational and study skills that they need.

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www.allkindsofminds.org (The LearningBase): "Getting Organized and Having Good Work Habits."

www.ala.org "Information Literacy . . . Best Practices."

www.Fiu.edu "Information Literacy Defined."

Resources

These resources are specifically geared to address a range of organizational issues including time management, materials and space management, and strategic planning skills.

Web Sites

All Kinds of Minds
www.allkindsofminds.org Explores the Institute's approach to supporting children's organizational abilities. The Library section of the site includes case studies and articles such as "The Realization and Utilization of Organization" by Dr. Mel Levine. The site's LearningBase offers further guidance and references for teachers and parents, including the feature, "Getting Organized and Developing Good Work Habits."

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication (ERIC/REC)
http://eric.indiana.edu/ Offers a collection of educational articles regarding student organization; search the database using keywords like *organization, study skills,* and *time management* to locate multiple articles for teachers, parents, counselors, and children.

LD Online
http://www.ldonline.org Links to extensive resources on the topic of organization; also offers tips on technology to assist children's organizational habits and time management skills.

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www.schwablearning.org Offers families information for identifying and managing differences in learning and resources for connecting with others; provides information in both Spanish and English.

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Sedita, Joan. **Helping Your Child with Organization and Study Skills.** This article highlights what parents and teachers need to know to help children get organized, from notebook set-up to highlighting key concepts while reading and listening. The author is a leading trainer for teachers in the field of study skills; full text can be found online at: www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/parenting/sedita_studyskills.html

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Levine, Melvin D. **Developmental Variations and Learning Disorders, 2d ed.** Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1998. Offers comprehensive information about developmental variations in children that can lead to learning difficulties, and explores research from different disciplines; useful for clinicians, educators, and parents.

Levine, Melvin D. **Educational Care, 2d edition.** Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 2002. Covers key themes in academic performance. The book is intended to be a practical guide to the understanding and collaborative management of differences in learning. For each topic, there are recommendations for what needs to be done at home and also in school to help a struggling child or adolescent succeed.

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The *Developing Minds* video library is produced by the Educational Programming and Outreach department, Special Telecommunications Services division of the WGBH Educational Foundation.

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***Developing Minds* is a production of WGBH Boston in association with All Kinds of Minds.**

Major funding for *Developing Minds* is provided by Schwab Learning, a program of the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation; ExxonMobil Foundation; Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Foundation; Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation; The Roberts Foundation; and Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

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ISBN 1-57807-750-8

UPC 7 83421 34403 7