Completing School Work at Home

Completing school work at home can raise significant difficulties and avoidant behaviours to some students with Autism. Some students compartmentalize activities at home and activities at school which can cause heightened anxiety if one encroaches on the other. Here are some tips that may help ease anxiety when asking students to complete schoolwork at home.

**Environment:**

Let the child choose the place in which they would like to complete the work, a quiet space free from distraction is best however, if they choose to complete the work lying on the couch, let them. Having this small element of control during a time of uncertainty and confusion may help ease anxiety.

**Visual timetable:**

Having a visual timetable allows for an element of predictability and routine. Including your child in making a routine for their day may help them to organise their thoughts in terms of what is expected of them and when.

**Timer**

Visual timers such as sand timers, stop watches and countdown apps on your phone can help students to visualise a clear start and end point to their task or activity. Negotiate the time span with the child. Short bursts of regular activity may be best to manage however, some students may prefer to get everything done in one go so they can have the rest of the day free of work. Again giving this choice and element of control may help ease anxiety.

**Provide a ‘finished box’**

It may be beneficial to have a box or tray with the word ‘finished’ or ‘complete’ on. This will give a sense of achievement to them after completing an activity, the physical action of placing it in the box/ tray can improve self-esteem and pride in their achievements. Also, having a start box with all work for that day might benefit some children in that it is giving them a clear expectation however, it may cause anxiety and ‘shut down’ for others who see it as overwhelming.

**Use their interests to motivate and reward.**

Discuss with your child a reward that they can have after completing an activity, this could be based around their interest such as:

* Time on the PlayStation
* Cooking or baking
* Arts and Crafts
* Lego

Giving children an incentive to finish school activities will often motivate them to work, as it is giving them an end goal that will provide them with gratification and reward.

IF YOUR CHILD STILL REFUSES TO ENGAGE OR IS BECOMING ANXIOUS AND FRUSTRATED DON’T WORRY, YOU HAVE DONE A GREAT JOB IN ATTEMPTING TO CONTINUE TO FACILITATE THEIR LEARNING AND YOU CAN ALWAYS TRY AGAIN TOMORROW ☺

Supporting Students to work at home using

Autism Initiatives 5 Point Star approach

Motivation:

What motivates your child to work?, it may be beneficial to adapt work given by school and personalise it to include their interests such as Lego, painting, food, TV programs. Students are more likely to engage in work and activities when it is based around their interests. For example, if a child is given an addition worksheet to complete, you could adapt it and instead of adding counters or numbers, you could use Lego or paint brushes. If your child has a barrier to writing in that is causes them anxiety you can record your learning through photographs and share with their teacher on return to school.

Understanding:

Does your child understand what they are being asked to do? It may be that if a child doesn’t understand the work initially they may ‘shut down’ for fear of making a mistake, which is often something that can cause anxiety in students with Autism. Talking through the activity bit by bit and breaking it down may help some students process the information.

Sensory:

Consider that environment you are asking your child to complete the work or activity in and relate that environment to their individual sensory profile. For example, if your child is hypersensitive to specific smells, it would provide distraction and discomfort to have the child sat in the kitchen completing the activity while you are cooking. If your child is hyposensitive and seeking vestibular input, it may be beneficial to complete activities while sitting on a yoga ball so they can self-regulate their movement. Providing the appropriate sensory environment can also aid focus and concentration.

Expectation:

Does your child understand what is being expected of them? See what their expectation of work is from teachers in school and compare that with your expectations from home. Discussing expectations can help reduce anxiety and provide clarity in an uncertain situation for many students.

Communication:

It is worth considering what the best way of communicating information regarding schoolwork is. It may be that broken down information repeated throughout the day may be more beneficial than sitting them down and explaining activities all at once. Repetition and reminding your child of when an activity will be starting may be received more favourably than saying ‘right, it’s time for homework,’ for example, in 10 minutes we will complete an activity, in 5 minutes, in 2 minutes etc, this can be reinforced with a visual timer to aid processing. It may also be beneficial to be aware of ‘trigger’ words that may be causing anxiety such as school, work, teacher, homework, maths etc. Learning what words are more likely to cause frustration and anxiety will help you communicate more effectively when it comes to school work and activities.