

Chapter 1

Overview: How to Use This Book

INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVENTIONS AND THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This book includes a description of five different interventions. You can pick and choose the interventions you try, depending on your child's needs. However, it is important to note that all of the interventions presented in this book rely on the same guiding principles, or keys that are critical to changing and improving children's behavior. These overarching principles are described in Chapter 2, and it is strongly recommended that you read Chapter 2 before implementing any of the interventions. By reading Chapter 2 first you will (a) know why the strategies suggested are likely to work, (b) be better able to overcome obstacles and fine-tune the interventions more quickly, and (c) go into the intervention process with a realistic idea of how much work will be required of you and therefore be more likely to develop a realistic intervention plan.

As described in detail in Chapter 2, simultaneously targeting more than two behaviors for improvement is very difficult. Targeting multiple behaviors or skills at once is very time consuming for the parent who is implementing the interventions, and it can be confusing for the child. Accordingly, Chapter 2 encourages parents to set priorities and to start by seeking to improve those areas that they deem most important for the child's academic success. If you are working with someone else (e.g., a partner or spouse) to implement these interventions, it may be helpful for you each to rank the interventions in order of importance and then compare lists and come to an agreement on where to start. The next sections briefly summarize the contents of each intervention described in this book to help you begin to think about which intervention to start with.

HOMEWORK RECORDING

Chapter 3 focuses on improving how consistently and accurately children record homework assignments and tests. Many children have difficulty consistently recording homework assignments in their school planners. As a parent, you know that it can be extremely difficult to support your child's homework completion at home if you don't know exactly what needs to be accomplished and when assignments are due. Sometimes teachers help children with recording homework assignments, or parents are able to look online to see what the child needs to complete. However, you still might want your child to take more responsibility for accurately

recording homework. This chapter provides strategies for promoting effective homework recording behaviors. This intervention would be a good place to start if you find that you are having daily battles with your child over what needs to be completed, or you are spending a lot of time trying to communicate with teachers to confirm what your child is expected to complete.

HOMWORK COMPLETION

Chapter 4 focuses on improving the actual process of homework completion after school. In this chapter, you will learn strategies for structuring the homework environment, keeping your child on task and focused, and helping your child complete homework efficiently. The chapter also includes some strategies for helping your child to study more efficiently. This intervention would be a good place to start if the process of completing homework each night is stressful and often leads to negative interactions or arguments with your child. You might also consider starting with this intervention if homework completion time goes smoothly but is taking considerably more time than teachers suggest it should. For example, if homework is taking so long that your child is not going to bed on time, then this would be an important intervention to try.

ORGANIZATION OF MATERIALS

Chapter 5 focuses on interventions and strategies for helping children improve the way they organize their school materials and keep them organized. Typically, classwork and homework papers are organized and transferred to and from school using a school binder and a bookbag. For this reason, the chapter provides strategies for establishing and monitoring structured systems for binders and bookbags. For example, your child has dozens of styles of school binders to choose from at the beginning of the school year. Which binder might work best for him, and why? The chapter also discusses techniques to help your child maintain systems of organization once they are established. This ability is important because many students start off the year organized but then rapidly become disorganized. If your child frequently completes homework but then fails to turn it in, or if your child forgets to bring home the books and assignments needed to complete homework, this intervention would be a good one to start with. Also, if you open your child's bookbag and find many crumpled papers at the bottom (and perhaps some old food and clothing), this would be an important intervention for you to try.

PLANNING AHEAD TO COMPLETE SCHOOLWORK

Chapter 6 provides strategies for improving children's ability to plan ahead for the completion of schoolwork, including homework, tests, and long-term projects. Children tend to procrastinate and to put off homework until the last minute. This tendency can cause considerable family stress about work completion and can also lead to rushed completion of work, careless mistakes, and poor preparation for tests. Planning ahead to complete schoolwork is an advanced skill. Accordingly, this intervention would work best with students who are middle school age and older. This might be a good intervention to start with if your child regularly records and completes homework but procrastinates and is thus not able to demonstrate his academic potential on tests. This would also be a good intervention for parents who have been supporting their child's planning activities and want to see him take more responsibility for planning ahead to complete work. For example, parents often want to begin teaching their child to take more responsibility for planning ahead because they anticipate transitions to high school and college, where parental support is more difficult to provide. This intervention can be used to transfer the responsibility for planning ahead from you to your child.

MANAGING TIME AND BALANCING RESPONSIBILITIES

Chapter 7 focuses on strategies and interventions to help children balance school and extracurricular responsibilities by teaching them to estimate how much time activities are likely to take and when they would best be accomplished during the week. This intervention is often implemented together with the planning intervention described in Chapter 6, or after those planning skills have been mastered. For example, if the child has planned ahead and specified that he is going to study flashcards for 30 minutes, the next step would be to think about when would be the best time to study, taking into consideration all the other activities that need to be completed after school. This intervention might be a good place to start if you have an adolescent who has a busy after-school schedule and has difficulty balancing school and extracurricular activities.

DECIDING WHERE TO START INTERVENTIONS

Often, children who have significant problems in one area are likely to have problems in other areas too. This can make it difficult for families to choose where to start their interventions. As noted above and as discussed in detail in the next chapter, it is best to start by targeting one or two skills (i.e., by implementing one or two interventions).

Ask yourself the following questions as part of your decision process:

1. If implemented perfectly, which skill would affect my child's grades the most?
2. If implemented perfectly, which skill would reduce our family's stress the most?
3. In terms of negative interactions with my child, which of these behaviors and skills is our family most frequently talking or arguing about?

COLLABORATION: WORKING WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Chapter 8 discusses the importance of gathering teacher input before you decide which intervention to start with, because teachers may be able to offer a unique perspective about which skills are most important for your child's academic success. Also, by contacting your child's school, you will find out whether or not the school is already providing interventions that target some of these homework and planning skills and whether or not your child is making progress as a result. For example, if a school mental health provider at your child's school is already focusing on organization of school materials and your child is making significant improvements, then you might want to focus your efforts on time management and planning. Alternatively, if a school mental health provider is focusing on organization and your child has been slow to respond, then it may be most beneficial for you to work collaboratively with the school mental health provider and to monitor and reward organization at home to support your child's progress. Sometimes parents need to gather more information before determining if the skills they are asking their child to work on are developmentally appropriate. Chapter 8 recommends that parents schedule a meeting with their child's teachers, school counselors, and school psychologist to discuss HOPS before they start implementing interventions. Teachers and counselors, who have the benefit of seeing many different same-age children, are good sources for knowing what would be developmentally appropriate expectations for your child.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION SYSTEMS

Chapter 9 provides two real life examples of families that have implemented the HOPS interventions. The term *real life* refers to the fact that sometimes implementing the interventions doesn't go exactly as planned and

adjustments need to be made. The family in the first example implemented the homework recording (Chapter 3) and the organization of materials (Chapter 5) interventions. Specifically, in this example, the parents of a sixth-grade student are implementing the teacher initials and bookbag and binder organization systems. The family in the second example implemented the planning ahead (Chapter 6) and balancing responsibilities (Chapter 7) interventions. In this example, the parents of a ninth-grade student are having their child use her planner to plan in advance for the completion of assignments, tests, and projects, and to use evening schedules to outline when those activities will occur during the day or week. As you will see in both of these examples, the parents initially had difficulty adhering to some of the guiding principles outlined in Chapter 2, and as a result, the interventions got off to a rough start. However, both of these families were able to make adjustments to how they were implementing the interventions and ended up with successful intervention systems.

CHOOSING NEXT STEPS

The final chapter in this book (Chapter 10) provides suggestions for parents whose children continue to struggle academically even after the HOPS interventions have been implemented. As noted in Chapter 10, children can experience academic difficulties for a wide variety of reasons, and not all of those reasons are addressed by the HOPS interventions. The chapter includes a table that is designed to help you begin to identify other aspects of your child's behavior that may be contributing to her academic difficulties. The chapter then provides recommendations for where you can seek out further assessment and intervention that will address the identified areas of weakness.