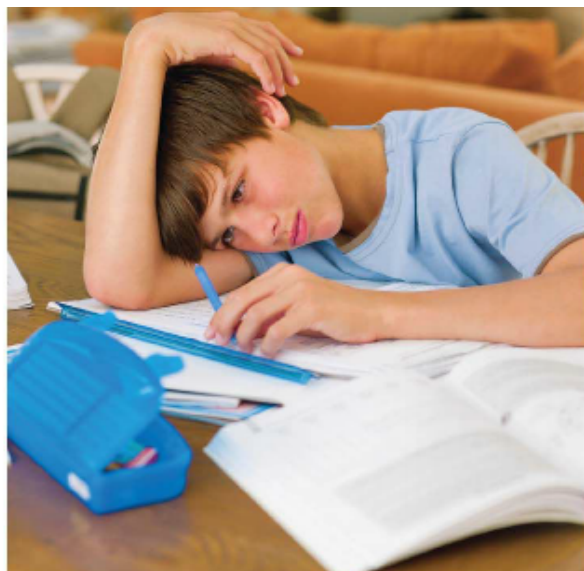


Experts respond to readers' questions with helpful suggestions and information.

Q: My 12-year-old is extremely forgetful and disorganized at home and school. My friends tell me this is normal behavior for kids this age. Is this normal and what can I do to help him?

Susan from Cave Creek



A: Most 12-year-olds are forgetful or disorganized at times, but usually not to an extreme level. Some children have more significant problems in these areas, which become more noticeable as they progress into higher grades where they are expected to be more independent and organized. First, it is important to be supportive and avoid being harsh when noticing these symptoms as these students often develop performance anxiety, which results in further lapses in attention when approaching tasks.

It is important students develop better habits for keeping track of instructions and tasks to complete and develop efficient systems for organizing themselves. Initially, students often need assistance from parents, teachers or other professionals to learn these skills, yet with additional practice, these skills become a habit and can be utilized with less effort. Many schools require students to use an agenda to keep track of assignments and tests, yet these are often not monitored. To be effective, students need to use these and other systems consistently.

Auditory alarm systems (such as on smart phones) and pop-up reminders on the computer can help signal when something needs attending to. Students who struggle to remember multiple instructions should get into the habit of writing lists and not relying on memory, yet adults may need to initially assist them in learning to create these lists. Voice recorders (or the voice memo functions of phones) can also be useful for making quick recordings of important information such as the sequence of tasks to complete. However, these systems are useless if the student doesn't frequently review the recordings (just as notes or day planners are not effective if people never review them).

Finally, many children with reduced attention or organizational skills feel overwhelmed when approaching complex tasks and need guidance from adults to learn how to approach such tasks. For instance, telling a child to "clean your room," "clean out your backpack," or "start your paper" is often not sufficient, as they initially need specific or concrete directions for tasks and school projects. This may

include showing them specific areas of the room they should organize and clean (possibly by demonstrating this first), as well as helping them break down the different steps to starting a paper. When parents talk through their own thought processes on how these tasks are done students learn how to independently organize this process for themselves, which gives them a self-dialogue to use when approaching these tasks.

Often, parents turn to professionals (psychologists, tutors, etc.) to assist in this process, which has the advantage of utilizing the clinician's knowledge of how to improve these skills. Also, by having the clinician provide some of this feedback and support, it often relieves tension between the parent and the child in developing these skills. Nevertheless, parent and teacher support is critical in helping students with attention or organizational problems to mature and grow into more organized and focused adults.

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Email questions to kimberly@azparenting.com, fax to 602-279-7976, mail to 4848 E. Cactus Rd., Rm 605-212, Scottsdale, AZ 85254. Include phone, email, name and city in which you reside. Submissions are subject to publish name and question. Phone number, email address, etc., remain confidential.