

# ADDITUDE *Inside the ADHD mind*

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## ORGANIZATION

### How to Shake Last Year's Frustrating Habits

One simple tool can keep you and your student from falling into the same frustrating habits.

BY BETH GUADAGNI

The start of a new school year is usually met with excitement and apprehension by students with attention deficit disorder ([ADHD or ADD](#)) and their parents. It's invigorating to get a fresh start, but there's the nagging worry that last year's struggles will be back this time around. As a learning specialist I have discovered a powerful and flexible strategy — preview/review — that will help parents and students avoiding getting into last year's school ruts.

Preview/review helps students select the right strategies for the right situations and monitor their performance. It can also be used by parents to ensure that they a) select a good plan for the school year, and b) have the mechanisms to monitor its success. Use this previewing process to plan ahead.

Previewing always begins with reflection. Enlist your child's help and make a list of last year's difficulties that could be problematic this year. Even if you're not sure which specific challenges he'll face, you can make guesses. The weekly book reports that gave your child fits last year may not be part of his new classroom routine, but it's a safe bet that he'll be expected to complete and submit regular [homework assignments](#). Remember: Effective solutions can be devised only when the specific problem is identified.

Make your list as precise as possible. "Bringing home the right materials" is too ambiguous. Dig deeper. Why was this task so difficult for your child to accomplish? Did he miss the teacher's instructions? Did he get so distracted because of the commotion at the end of the day that he couldn't remember to collect his homework folder? Did he [[The Big List of ADHD School Resources from ADDitude](#)]

Once you and your child have identified several specific challenges, devise a plan. Solutions will depend on the specific challenge, your child, and his environment, but the following principles usually work for children with attention difficulties:

- Build in concrete reminders. Attach a keychain with a checkmark on it to the zipper of your child's backpack. When he zips up his bag to go home, this will remind him to "check" inside for his materials. Or work to forge an association in your child's mind between the end-of-day bell and a backpack check. Make a game of it at home by imitating the sound of the school bell at unexpected times during the day; your child will be expected to call out, "Time to check my backpack!"
- Enlist the help of your child's teacher. You might ask her to spend a few moments checking your child's backpack at the end of the day. Each time she finds that he has everything he needs, he might earn a point toward a reward.
- Arrange a partnership between your child and a friend. They could check each other's bags before heading home. If they pack the right materials every day for a week, they might earn a treat, like a movie night together.

*[[The Messy Student's Guide to Organization](#)]*

Some parents find that rehearsals deepen the impact of previewing. Trying out a strategy at home gives your child a chance to practice the new procedure, increasing the chances that he'll know what to do at school. It also gives both of you the chance to identify and correct any problems with the strategy.

Suppose you decide together that your child will fill out a laminated checklist before leaving his classroom to help him remember needed materials. Prepare for the rehearsal by scattering the checklist, his jacket, and some books, pencils, and papers on a table. (Be sure to include things that are not on his list to make the task as realistic as possible!) Recruit several family members to stage conversations or provide other plausible distractions. Then ask him to pack up.

When he seems to understand the procedure, [use a timer](#) and challenge him to pack faster while still checking off the right boxes. His practice sessions may highlight problems with your plan. If the checklist gets lost in the shuffle, for example, it may be best to print it on bright paper or to clip it to a clipboard with a wet-erase marker tied to it so that he can find what he needs quickly.

Through specific previewing, your family can generate a concrete plan for the upcoming school year. Next, learn about [reviewing](#) — the process of monitoring for success.

*[The Back-to-School Playbook for Students with ADHD]*

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