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Control the clock

Teaching students time management skills for school and life

by JOANNE SALLAY



MARK BEAUCHAMP

Joanne Sallay is the president and CEO of Teachers on Call (teachersoncall.ca), a Canadian in-home and online tutoring service that provides learning support by professional certified teachers.

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Time management, organization and planning have never come naturally to me—an ironic truth, considering I work in education. Yet, I know I'm not alone. Many parents struggle with executive functioning skills themselves, so it's no surprise that teaching these habits to children can feel overwhelming.

Professionally, at Teachers on Call, I often hear from families seeking academic coaching through our tutoring service for students who struggle with crumpled papers, inconsistent study routines and missed due dates. These challenges don't stem from a lack of ability, but often from the underuse of effective study strategies—leading to stress over looming deadlines and frustration at not achieving full academic potential.

Sound familiar? I believe the key is to be proactive in building these skills and to remember no one has to navigate the process alone. The start of the school year is the perfect time to dive into planning, especially as course schedules are finalized and extracurricular activities resume.

Here are some expert-backed tips from the fields of education and mental health and wellness to help families learn practical strategies to support a successful school year.

Executive functioning strategies benefit all students

Although students with learning disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders often struggle with executive functioning skills, these challenges aren't exclusive to



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those groups. In fact, many of the strategies recommended by professionals can benefit all learners.

Costco member Kim Abramowitz, an executive function and ADHD coach at Springboard ADHD Clinic in Oakville and Toronto, Ontario, says, “Building time management skills isn’t about getting it perfect—it’s about progress, patience and practicing [using] the right tools.” She adds, “We focus on everyday strategies that parents and kids can use together to reduce stress, build structure and support success at home and school.”

Use past report cards as a guide

While we’re at the start of the season and report cards may feel like a distant concern, it’s worth taking a moment to review last year’s report. It can offer valuable insights into your child’s strengths and areas for growth—well before the first progress report card of the new school year arrives home.

“While the entire report card matters, the front page is especially helpful because it focuses on learning skills and work habits,” says Peter Chin, associate dean of teacher education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, and a Costco member. “These are essential for success—not just in school, but for life readiness and the world of work. If a student is struggling in these areas, we need to provide support—just as we would offer remediation to a student having difficulty with fractions.”

Managing extracurriculars with confidence

It’s important to remember that time management extends to balancing extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, volunteering and downtime. This is a natural time to plan and prioritize sports, clubs and community involvement outside the classroom.

“One of the biggest mistakes students make is waiting to plan their extracurriculars,” says Colleen Reed, an independent education consultant and founder of American College Consulting, a firm supporting students applying to American, Canadian and UK universities, and a Costco member. “Start early by putting your heart and soul into trying new things. Go to club fairs, speak to older peers and make a proper plan for your extracurricular involvement. Early planning helps students learn how to spend their time meaningfully and make a community impact—skills that support success far beyond high school.”

Supporting a child’s progress and development is a team effort, and there are many people who can help students build these habits early—whether it’s a classroom teacher, professional tutor, academic coach, education consultant or a family member. And if you find these areas challenging yourself, that’s OK. Learning together is a powerful way to show that education is an ongoing journey for everyone. ■



STRATEGIES THAT STICK

Kim Abramowitz and Eimear Fitzpatrick, coaches from Springboard ADHD Clinic, offer these strategies:

- Break assignments into smaller, manageable steps.
- Place clocks around your home to build awareness.
- Compare estimated and actual time spent to develop a realistic sense of how long tasks take.
- Block out time for everything that matters: homework, free time, play and connection. This turns scheduling into a tool for balance, not restriction.—JS

Tools for success

Help your child stay organized with a mix of physical and digital tools. Place a wall or desk calendar somewhere visible and review daily for

visual planning. Pair it with an agenda and an analogue or digital watch to track time. Digital tools like calendar apps and reminder alerts can support staying on schedule. Visual timers, whiteboards,

colour-coded binders and folders, highlighters and labels are also helpful for organizing tasks and studying—making routines easier to follow at home and school.—JS