

Helping a Child Who Loses Homework, Papers, and School Materials

When papers, homework, and school materials disappear repeatedly, the most effective first step is usually to simplify the system rather than add more reminders. Organization, time management, and planning become increasingly important as students move through school and manage more teachers, materials, and assignments.¹ IES-funded school research on organizational-skills training specifically targets four common challenges: tracking assignments, managing materials, managing time, and planning longer-term work.² At home, reduce the number of places an item can go. Use one homework folder, one backpack pocket for items that must return to school, and one permanent location for the backpack. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a consistent daily routine and a single home "launch pad" for backpacks, school projects, and other items children need each day.³ Add a short backpack reset at the same time each afternoon or evening: remove trash and outdated papers, place active assignments in the homework area, return completed work to the designated folder, and restock only the materials needed for the next day. Teach the sequence and have the child complete each step while you supervise, then gradually reduce your involvement. If materials are still being lost, identify the exact transition where the loss occurs - classroom to backpack, backpack to home, homework area to backpack, or backpack to teacher - and put the checkpoint there. A simple system that is used every day is more useful than an elaborate system that is abandoned after a week.

Did You Know?

- ✓ IES describes organization, time management, and planning as higher-order skills that become increasingly important as school demands increase.¹
- ✓ IES-funded organizational-skills training directly teaches students to track assignments, manage materials, manage time, and plan longer-term work.²
- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends consistent routines and a single home "launch pad" for backpacks and school materials.³

Research Sources

1. Institute of Education Sciences. "Updating School-Based Measurement of Organization, Time Management, and Planning Skills for the Modern Secondary Classroom."
2. Institute of Education Sciences. "Evaluation of Organization Skills Training Program for Upper Elementary Students."
3. American Academy of Pediatrics, HealthyChildren.org. "Ten Tips for Your Child's Success in School."

Ten-Minute Backpack and Materials Reset

Use this page to create one repeatable route for papers and school materials so fewer items disappear between school and home.

Child's name: _____ Date: _____

School/grade: _____ Reset time: _____

1. Empty the Backpack - About 2 Minutes

Remove loose papers, trash, old notices, and materials that do not belong there.

Items removed: _____

2. Sort Active Schoolwork - About 2 Minutes

Place current assignments and papers in one designated homework folder or location.

Active work: _____

3. Pack Completed Work - About 2 Minutes

Put finished assignments into the one folder or pocket used for returning work to school.

Ready to return: _____

4. Restock What Is Needed - About 3 Minutes

Check tomorrow's classes and add only the materials that are actually needed.

Materials packed: _____

5. Park the Backpack - About 1 Minute

Place the backpack in the same launch-pad location every day.

Launch-pad location: _____

What Parents Can Say: "Everything needs one home. Let us put each school item in the same place every day until the routine becomes automatic."