

## “I Forgot to Remember”

Mom-approved strategies to improve your child’s working memory. **BY MELINDA BORING**

**A**FTER YET ANOTHER PROMPT FROM me, my son replied, “I meant to do it, Mom, but I forgot to remember.” Have you ever helped your child with homework only to have her forget to turn it in? Are you baffled when your child can spell words correctly at home, but gets the same words wrong on the spelling test? These experiences are common to children with ADHD. Having a weak working memory, in addition to being easily distracted, leads to many challenges in retaining information. Here are several recall techniques that have worked well for my kids.

**GET EMOTIONAL.** Positive emotions set the stage for new learning. When you engage your child’s emotions, he is more likely to remember information. Try introducing a topic by sharing a story with a character or circumstance that your student can relate to. When your child is struggling to memorize math facts, remind him of a story or movie or video he read or watched in which a dog or a boy finds his way back home against tough odds. If you can’t think of a pertinent story, help a student recall a time when he stuck with a hard task and completed it. Those good feelings can motivate and engage a student as he learns new material.

**GET CREATIVE.** Novelty helps an ADHD child remember information. Introduce a topic with a brief demonstration, using real objects or hands-on activities to attract the student’s attention. Write words on a blank piece of paper, so they can be seen through the bubbles on bubble wrap. Give the student 30 seconds to read as many words as she can, popping each bubble as she goes. Other creative learning strategies include inserting a pencil through an orange to show how the earth revolves and rotates at the same time, or letting a child watch a YouTube video about a skateboarding ac-



Physical activity helps information shift from short- to long-term memory.

cident before teaching anatomy or first aid.

**USE SENSORY CUES.** Studies show that the scent of peppermint enhances alertness and facilitates learning. Have your child suck on peppermints while studying. If your school doesn’t allow candy in the classroom, put a few drops of essential oil on a cotton ball. Your child can pull it out and take a whiff when her concentration needs a boost.

**CREATE MNEMONICS.** These memory aids and strategies improve memorization. Here are my favorites:

> **Acronyms** use the first letter of each word in a sequence to improve your child’s recall: Use COW to remember the western coastal states of California, Oregon, and Washington.

> **Acrostics** help a child remember by using phrases starting with the first letter of each item to be recalled. In science you can use the phrase **Kings Play Chess On Finely Ground Sand** to recall Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species. For the algebraic order of operations in math, use

**Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally** (Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction). In music, to remember the treble clef line notes from bottom to top, use **Every Good Boy Does Fine** (EGBDF). For geography, **Never Eat Soggy Waffles** (North, East, South, West) will sharpen a child’s map skills. Acrostics let you know that you have remembered all of the items on a list.

> **Number-rhyme mnemonics.** Select objects that rhyme with the numbers 1-10. Example: 1 = sun, 2 = shoe, 3 = tree, and so on. To learn new information, a student visualizes the number rhyme interacting with the items to memorize. Example: The child needs to go to the bedroom and bring back three things: a pencil, a sweatshirt, and a library book. A student can picture a pencil catching fire from the sun, pulling a sweatshirt out of a shoe,

and climbing a tree to retrieve a library book.

**GET MOVING.** Allowing the student to move while learning is sometimes all it takes to increase motivation and retention of material. Physical activity reduces stress and increases energy, and it can help information cross the midline of the brain, so that it is shared by both brain hemispheres. This increases the likelihood that information will shift from short- to long-term memory.

A child can stay active and improve recall by playing with a fidget toy. Manipulating materials with her hands extends a child’s attention span and focus.

The ADHD brain loves variety, brevity, and novelty. After you teach the strategies above to your child, have her come up with her own. While these memory tips and tricks support weak working memory and improve recall, there are always new ones to try. Work with your child to find them. **A**

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Go to **ADDitudeMag.com** for more tips on improving your child’s memory (search “Working Memory and ADHD Children”).