

Help families and school staff establish open lines of communication. Both school staff and families need to consider homework from a student's perspective.

Consider what Myles Himmelreich, a young man impacted by FASD, has to say about his homework experience:

“It was frustrating for me trying to do homework. By the time I sat down to do it, I had forgotten the steps the teacher taught me at school. My parents would try and show me the steps but they were different steps from what the teacher used. I did not understand what my parents were saying and I would become angry and frustrated. I could do it fine at school earlier in the day but now at home, I could not. It was like I was right there but couldn't reach it.”

Offer samples of positively-focused home-school communication books. Help families establish homework routines that work for them and their children.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES

■ *Help families and school staff establish lines of communication.*

Share a questionnaire, such as the *Let's Stay In Touch* sample letter, for school staff to use to find out the best ways to communicate with individual families.

Questionnaires encourage parents and teachers to discuss:

- how often they need to be in contact
- the best way to reach each other (e.g., phone, e-mail, notes)
- the best times to reach each other
- what they need to communicate about.

See **Tool V** for a **Let's Stay in Touch** template.



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■ *Offer ideas for positively-focused home-school communication books.*

Some families may wish to have daily communication with school staff. A home-school communication book may be the most practical way to do this. To ensure that the communication is clear, positive and focused, encourage families and school staff to identify specific behaviours and issues they will communicate on. A checklist may be a good solution—this format tends to be manageable for the school staff and the structure encourages consistent and objective reporting. A checklist format also keeps the focus on specific behaviours that have been identified as important.

In addition, communication books can include information on upcoming events, changes in routes or other school news.

The goal of home-school communication books should be encouragement rather than punishment. Home-school communication books are most effective when school staff are committed to keeping the reports as positive as possible, recognizing that neither parents and caregivers nor students need the discouragement of continual “bad news.” See the sample formats in the related tools noted below.

See **Tool W** for the **Daily Report** template and **Tool X** for the **My School Day Report** template.

■ *Look for strategies that will make managing communication between home and school a hassle-free process.*

Ensuring that written communication goes safely back and forth between home and school can be challenging. There are creative solutions that can make this routine easier on everyone, including parents and school staff.

If the student is having difficulty remembering to take communications between home and school, use alternative strategies such as the following:

- Designate a special plastic labeled envelope for this purpose and attach it to the student’s homework agenda.
- Add the daily report or homework materials to a list of items that the student checks off before leaving school at the end of the day.
- When possible, fax or e-mail communications directly to the student’s home. This can be especially effective for time-sensitive documents such as permission slips for field trips.

Another strategy for ensuring that the student is more likely to bring a communication home is to include positive comments about the student (and making sure the student knows about these comments before he or she leaves school).



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■ *Help parents develop a plan for managing homework.*

Homework can be a challenge for many families of students with FASD. Encourage parents to do the following:

- set up a regular time for homework or develop a weekly homework schedule
- provide a quiet workspace and keep it stocked with needed materials
- review the recorded assignments with the child
- use this time to build a positive, supportive relationship with their child
- assist the child in planning the tasks that need to be completed
- work cooperatively with the child
- schedule breaks or reward partially completed tasks with a break
- emphasize the positive by looking for things the child has done correctly and giving positive feedback
- let the teacher know if the homework is too confusing or difficult for the child to do or if it is taking too long. A general rule of thumb is a maximum of 10 minutes per grade; e.g., Grade 3 student, no more than 30 minutes, including short breaks every 15 minutes or so.

If homework becomes an ongoing issue for families, encourage parents to talk to the teacher about alternate solutions.

For some students and families, the best solution might be no homework if it causes undue stress and tension.

