

Section I

ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT

ATTITUDES ABOUT HOMEWORK

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

1. Assess the family dynamics or stressors that contribute to the client's resistance to completing homework assignments.
2. Reduce the frequency of arguments and degree of emotional intensity between client and parents over the issue of homework.
3. Assist in developing a plan to increase the frequency of completion of homework assignments.
4. Complete homework assignments on a regular, consistent basis.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Oppositional Defiant

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

This exercise is designed for adolescent clients who have frequent arguments with their parents and/or have difficulty completing their homework. The purpose of the exercise is to assess family dynamics surrounding the issue of homework. The parents and client are both required to read three vignettes and respond to their respective questionnaires. The therapist reviews their responses in the follow-up therapy sessions to formulate a plan that will help the client to complete his/her homework more often, as well as reduce the degree of emotional intensity surrounding this issue. Beware: The client who has difficulty completing his/her school homework may very well have difficulty completing this therapy homework assignment. The client's resistance to completing the homework assignment may be processed either before or after the homework assignment is given.

ATTITUDES ABOUT HOMEWORK

Families differ widely over how they deal with the issue of homework. In some homes, homework is an issue that precipitates heated arguments between parents and teenagers. On the other hand, some teenagers experience very few problems with their parents about homework. The following three case studies describe different family scenes focusing on the issue of homework. As you read the case studies, consider how your family may be similar to or different from the families described in dealing with homework issues. After you finish reading the three case studies, please complete the appropriate questionnaire.

Family Scene I

“I don’t have any homework,” Jimmy Keller angrily told his father, “and I’m tired of you always nagging me about it!”

Irritated, Mr. Keller replied, “Well, I wouldn’t always have to check up on your schoolwork if you would just be responsible and do it. I got a call from Mr. Smith, your math teacher, and he says you have four incomplete assignments. What’s up with that?”

“Nothing’s up with that,” Jimmy responded in exasperation. “I’ve already turned them in. I did them in ...”

Mr. Keller cut his son off, “You told me that when I got a call from your science teacher. Then I went to conferences and found out that you hadn’t turned several assignments in. How can I trust you?” The argument continued for a few more minutes before Mr. Keller threw up his arms in frustration and said, “I give up!”

Jimmy stormed to his room, too angry to even try to do his homework. He called a friend instead.

Family Scene II

“Mom, it’s just a rough draft. It’s not the final copy. I just wanted to know whether you thought my ideas sounded good,” Kimberly expressed in frustration. “You don’t have to be so critical about the spelling and punctuation errors. I’ll correct those later on the computer.”

Pat, Kimberly’s mother, said, “You don’t have to be so defensive. I’m just trying to help save you time by pointing out the mistakes now. Besides, you don’t always recheck your essays for spelling errors.”

Kimberly rolled her eyes and thought to herself, “Why did I even bring the essay to her? She’s always so picky about the smallest mistakes.”

Sensing her daughter’s irritation, Pat told her, “Don’t roll your eyes at me. I wouldn’t have to be so picky if you would just learn to recheck your work.”

“Fine,” Kimberly said, gritting her teeth. “Just give me the paper and I’ll make the corrections.” Kimberly snatched the paper from her mother’s hand and walked out of the room.

Family Scene III

Eric’s mother came into the kitchen carrying two bags of groceries. She said, “Oh, hi, Eric. I see you’ve already gotten a jump on your homework. Good for you.”

Eric smiled and said, “Yeah, I wanted to get it done before the basketball game tonight. Michael called and asked if I wanted to go to the game with him. Is that okay?”

Eric’s mother said, “Sure, if you get your homework done, you can go. And I want you to know that I appreciate it so much that you are taking responsibility for getting your homework done without me having to hassle you constantly. You’re a neat kid.” Eric completed his homework and called his friend, Michael, to get a ride to the game.

ATTITUDES ABOUT HOMEWORK

CLIENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How would you describe a common scene in your home over the issue of homework? How is your family situation either similar to or different from the family scenes described?

Similar: _____

Different: _____

2. Describe your typical attitude about doing homework.

3. How would your parents describe your attitude about getting your homework done?

4. What role have your parents taken with your homework?

5. If you were free to say anything to your parents about their attitude about your doing homework, what would it be?

6. If there is tension in your home about this issue, what can you do to help decrease the tension?

7. What do you think your parents can do to help decrease the tension?

8. What changes can you make that would help you complete your homework regularly?

9. What things can your parents do to help you regularly complete your homework?

Be sure to bring this homework to your next session with your therapist, and be prepared to talk about your thoughts and feelings about this exercise.

ATTITUDES ABOUT HOMEWORK

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How would you describe a common scene in your home over the issue of homework? How is your family situation either similar to or different from the family scenes described?

Similar: _____

Different: _____

2. How would you describe your son's/daughter's attitude about doing his/her homework?

3. Describe your attitude regarding your son/daughter completing his/her homework.

4. How would your son/daughter describe your attitude about him/her doing homework?

5. What role have you taken in regard to your son/daughter doing homework?

6. If you were free to say anything to your son/daughter about their attitude toward completing homework, what would it be?

7. What changes can your son/daughter make to complete his/her homework regularly?

8. What changes can you make to help your son/daughter complete his/her homework regularly?

Be sure to bring this homework to your next session with your therapist, and be prepared to talk about your thoughts and feelings about this exercise.

IDENTIFY STEPS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

1. Formulate positive, specific goals regarding school performance.
2. Identify the steps needed to improve school performance or achieve goals.
3. Develop a list of resource people within or outside of the school setting who can be turned to for support, assistance, or instruction for learning problems.
4. Establish a regular routine that allows time to complete homework or fulfill school responsibilities, while also meeting emotional/social needs.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL

- ADHD
- Conduct Disorder
- Depression
- Mental Retardation
- Oppositional Defiant

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

This exercise serves several purposes. First, the client and parents are asked to formulate specific goals regarding his/her school performance. The client and parents are also required to think about what positive steps can be taken to achieve the identified goals. The exercise may be useful for uncovering factors that interfere with the client's school performance. The exercise should be assigned during the early stages of treatment. The therapist may also choose to complete the form with the client and his/her parents in the initial clinical interview. Another option is to mail the forms to the client and parents before they come in for the first interview if it is known that the presenting problem centers around the client's academic underachievement or learning problems. This will help the client and parents begin to think about what changes need to occur before they even arrive for the first therapy session.

IDENTIFY STEPS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

CLIENT FORM

Please answer the following questions about your school performance. Your responses can help your therapist and you develop an action plan to improve your school performance.

1. What are your goals or expectations regarding what grades you will receive in each course you are taking?

2. What factors or stressful events have kept you from performing better at school? (For example: learning weakness in certain subjects, stress at home or school, incomplete homework, lack of interest, etc.)

3. What have you recently tried to do to improve your grades or school performance?

4. Think back on times when you achieved good grades. What things did you do to achieve the good grades?

5. What positive changes can you make now to improve your school performance?

6. On the other hand, what self-defeating behaviors can you stop doing to improve your school performance?

7. What can your parents or family members do to help you improve your school performance?

8. Who are other people at school or in the community who you can turn to for support or help at school?

Be sure to bring this homework to your next session with your therapist, and be prepared to talk about your thoughts and feelings about this exercise.

IDENTIFY STEPS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

PARENT FORM

Please answer the following questions about your son's/daughter's school performance. Your response can help your therapist and family develop an action plan to improve your son's/daughter's school performance.

1. What are your goals or expectations regarding what grades your son/daughter will receive in each course he/she is taking?

2. What factors or stressful events do you believe have interfered with your son's/daughter's performance at school? (For example: learning weakness in certain subjects, incomplete homework, lack of interest, stress at home or school, etc.)

3. What strategies have you recently tried to improve your son's/daughter's grades or school performance?

4. Think back on times when your son/daughter achieved good grades. What factors contributed to this?

5. What positive changes can your son/daughter make to improve his/her school performance?

6. On the other hand, what self-defeating behaviors should your son/daughter stop doing to improve his/her school performance?

7. What can you do to help motivate or improve your son's/daughter's school performance?

8. Who are other resource people at school or in the community who can help your son/daughter perform better at school or overcome his/her learning problems?

Be sure to bring this homework to your next session with your therapist, and be prepared to talk about your thoughts and feelings about this exercise.

