

Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore/Clay Counties

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Back to School Tips

With the school year starting, this means the busyness of afterschool activities and homework assignments will be here soon. As families are pulled in different directions for school, work and practices, time as a family comes at a premium. Making efforts to build the focus of your children could decrease time spent on homework to free up more time for family activities. Creating a permanent, designated study space is one way to build your youth's focus. Here are a few items to keep in mind when creating the study space:

Make It Work For You – Every child is different and has different needs. Some prefer a quiet corner in their room while others may prefer to be close to a parent for help at the kitchen table. Just make sure that the traffic and noise of other family members do not become a distraction.

Manage the Senses – Lighting and noise issues are very common distractions. Tired eyes have more difficulty transferring knowledge into memory. To keep sharp, make sure to provide adequate overhead lighting to limit squinting. Also, check that electronic devices like laptops and tablets are set at a comfortable level.

Make It Comfortable – Temperature and seating can make a difference in a youth's ability to concentrate. Make sure that the study space keeps the child relaxed, but alert. It is also important that he or she has adequate space to spread out books, papers and materials to make the space efficient. While a bed may make a great space for spreading out, it may prove too relaxing. Consider a cushioned chair with generous table space. Also, it is important that the chair fit the youth. Dangling legs and hunched shoulders can create distractions as well.

Keep It Organized – Another way to increase the efficiency of the space is to keep all supplies and materials readily available and easy to find. Any time spent looking for the lost blue marker is time spent away from the task and an opportunity for further distraction. Organized space provides a launching pad for organized study. Keep clutter at a minimum using cubbies, canisters and boxes. A calendar, planner or to-do list can also keep homework assignments and activities prioritized and on track for on-time completion.

Limit Distractions – While the computer and television can be excellent sources of educational content, they also provide limitless distraction. If the child believes they can focus better with a little background noise, try some recorded music and save the favorite show as a reward when they can spare his or her attention.

Make It Your Own – If the child is expected to spend considerable time in the study space, let him or her decorate the space with posters, pictures or artwork. These items could provide creative inspiration for the child's next essay or art project.

This article comes from a series of resources developed by Nebraska Extension, 4-H Youth Development Professionals. Learn more about 4-H at 4h.unl.edu, follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Nebraska4H/> or on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/nebraska4h>. For more information, contact the author – Jennifer Schoen (jschoen4@unl.edu), Extension Educator.