

Needs Help Staying on Task

(Assertive Learning Skills)

Assertive Learning is both a set of skills and an interesting characteristic of the brain. Learning is more effective when more of the brain is involved and active in the process. An energized brain will be able to give greater attention and organize information more successfully. Assertive Learning is a set of behaviors children need to master in order to make use of the mental capabilities they are developing. A talented body will go to waste if the athlete does not have the dedication to train it. Likewise, a brilliant brain will go to waste if a child does not have the discipline to use it.

Assertive Learning involves at least ten basic skills that children must be aware of and practice in order to be in control of a learning situation. These skills are presented more fully throughout this section, but for now, it is sufficient to summarize the Assertive Learning Skills (ALS) as the following:

1. Organizing Work
2. Listening
3. Clarifying Instructions
4. Questioning
5. Estimating
6. Predicting the Results
7. Starting
8. Staying on Task
9. Self-Monitoring
10. Completing Work

Notice that all of the skills involve verbs. Your child is expected to assume the duties of active participation, thought, self-monitoring, and supervision. As a parent, you can help your child be successful in each of the ten skills.

↪ **Assertive Learning**

Go over the Assertive Learning Skills (ALS) together with your child. Help him gain an understanding of each one and learn how to use them in school to become a better learner.

Materials

- ALS cards (make one set of index cards with the name of each Assertive Learning Skill written on them and another set with the short definition of each Assertive Learning Skill).
- scissors
- markers
- glue sticks

Activity #1

Give the following explanation to your child: A great brain will do you no good if you lack the ability to be responsible for your learning. For example, you could be the greatest mathematician in the world, but if you are so unorganized that you always lose your assignments, you will still fail your math class. Let's learn about Assertive Learning Skills. These are the skills that allow you to be in charge of your learning.

↪ **Definition**

Explain what it means to be an “assertive” student by contrasting it with being “aggressive” and “passive.”

↪ **The Passive Mouse at School...**

- Does not do anything unless the teacher or parent asks.
- Only writes down the notes that the teacher says to write down or writes on the chalkboard.
- Only studies exactly what the teacher says will be on the test.

↪ **The Aggressive Monster at School...**

- Only learns what he or she wants to learn.
- Doesn't do anything the teacher asks.

- Only does assignments the way that he or she wants to do them.

Ask, “What do you think an “assertive” student is like?”

Activity #2

Go through each of the following Assertive Learning Skills with your child.

Assertive Learning Skills

1. **ORGANIZING WORK:** I arrange and plan.

Do I have all the supplies I need to be successful with a project or an assignment? Is my environment, workplace, lighting, etc. conducive to my success?

Am I aware of how best to get the work down on paper so I or anyone else can read, follow, or use my work? Is there a better way to simplify any confusing area or part? Can I experience the personal power feeling when I am in control of my environment?

2. **LISTENING:** I am an active learner.

Am I an active learner by listening to my teacher, parents, or friends? Am I being quiet so that I can listen to my inner voice? Am I paying attention? Do I listen in order to receive instructions necessary to start and complete, to problem solve, to ask and answer questions, to spark my imagination?

3. **CLARIFYING INSTRUCTIONS:** I create a clear understanding.

Am I able to repeat back to the teacher or to myself what I understood that I am to do? Do I know how to start and proceed? Do the instructions make sense to me?

In math, clarifying instructions means I will ask myself if I understand what the problem is asking and if I know what information I need to solve the problem.

4. **QUESTIONING:** I ask and answer questions.

Do I, could I, would I ask a question to myself, to a teacher, to a parent, or to a friend about something I did not understand or wanted to know?

Am I an active learner and listener? Am I involved and paying attention to the discussion, activity, or lecture, etc. so I will be able to contribute by answering

questions?

5. **ESTIMATING:** I judge and evaluate.

I estimate how much time it will take me to complete my work. When I finish my work, I compare the actual time against my estimated time. How did I do? Does estimating help me make better use of my time?

In math, estimating helps me to make reasonable judgments about what the answers to the problems will be.

7. **PREDICTING THE RESULTS:** I declare the outcome in advance.

Do I know how my assignment or task will end? What will I have as a result of my work? Do I understand the law of cause and effect, here? Do I know that, the more I understand what I must do and understand the best way to do it, the more I will experience better results with the end product? Can I give myself credit for predicting great results and know that I have created those results?

8. **STARTING:** I begin the work.

Do I begin my work immediately after it has been presented or at the agreed upon starting time? Do I avoid distractions, daydreaming, and procrastination?

Starting in math means I know how to set up the facts and begin computing to find the answer to the problem.

9. **STAYING ON TASK:** I keep working.

Do I keep working until my assignment or project is completed? Do I experience that satisfied feeling of knowing that, through my persistence, I have been productive?

10. **SELF-MONITORING:** I evaluate my attitudes and habits.

I take a look at myself by evaluating my behavior and study habits. I can talk to myself and describe what I am doing. Am I on task and working toward the goal being pursued? Do I need to make any changes in my behavior, thoughts, or attitude?

11. **COMPLETING WORK:** I finish my work.

Are all parts of my work or project finished? Have I set up a system to check things off so I know that I have finished my work? Have I experienced and acknowledged the feelings of success, satisfaction, relief, and pleasure that come from following through and finishing?

Use the following tasks to introduce the Assertive Learning Skills. After completing each task, ask your child which ALS the task focuses on.

↻ ALS Cards

Give your child the two sets of the ALS cards you made (with the names and definitions) and have him mix them up on the table. Have him arrange them by matching the name to the definition. When he's finished, ask him to evaluate his work. (ALS used: Organizing Work, Self-Monitoring)

Tell him to turn the name cards face down and randomly pick a card. In the following activities, he should demonstrate the ALS on the card he picked.

Activity #3

Listen and Draw

Give your child a blank piece of paper and a pencil to complete this activity. As you speak, have your child follow the directions given below. This is a fun activity to help children experience early listening success. Present the directions below at a normal, conversational speaking rate. Use normal inflection. Repeat each instruction once. Pause after each instruction to give your child time to complete the task before going on.

1. In the middle of your paper, draw a rectangle. It should be about 7 inches long and 3 inches high.

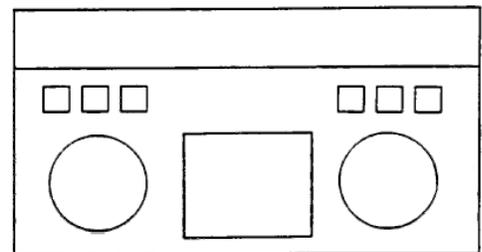
2. In the middle of your rectangle, draw a smaller rectangle. It should be about 2 inches long and 1.5 inches high.

3. On both sides of the small rectangle, draw a circle. Each circle should be about 1.5 inches in diameter.

4. Above each circle, draw 3 very small squares. Each will be about the size of a telephone push button.

5. Next, at the top of the big rectangle draw a half-inch vertical line upward at each end of the rectangle.

6. Last, connect those two lines with one long, straight, horizontal line.



7. What did you draw? (answer: a boom box)

(ALS used: Listening, Questioning, Clarifying Instructions, Estimating)

Activity #4

Procrastination List

Have your child make a list of five things he does to avoid doing homework.

(ALS used: Starting, Staying on Task, Finishing)

Activity #5

Animal Game

Think of an animal. Have your child try to guess what it is by asking only “yes” or “no” questions.

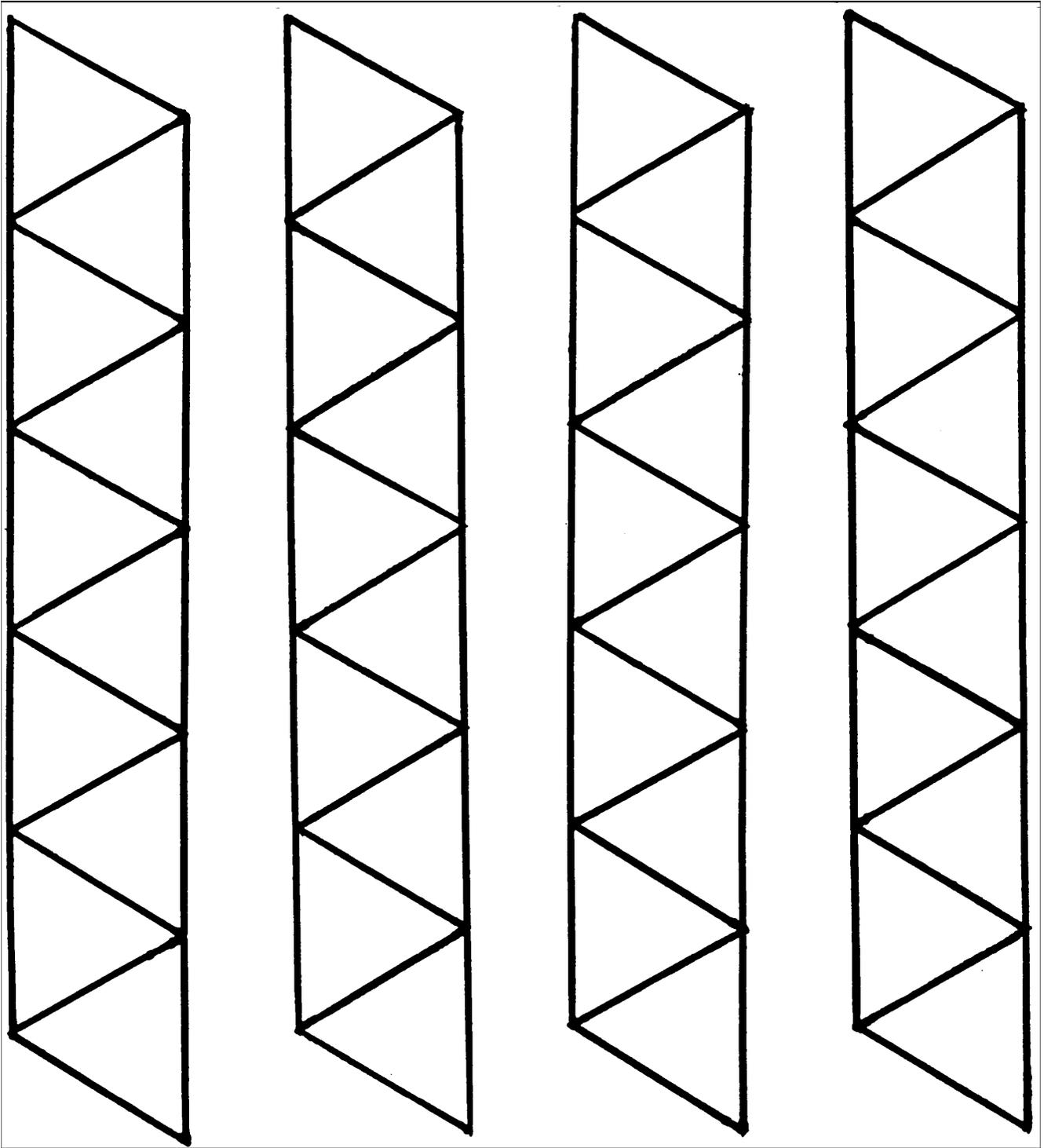
(ALS used: Questioning)

Activity #6

This activity can be found on the next page. Give your child a copy of this page along with scissors, markers, and a glue stick. Have him follow these instructions.

- Cut out the Flexihexagon— the outside lines only. Place it vertically in front of you.
- Count up four triangles from the bottom and fold up.
- Fold back (toward you) the top triangle on the section that you just folded.
- Count three triangles down from the top. Fold the section down (toward you) and place the top triangle under the triangle you just folded back. Use a glue stick to hold in place. A hexagon is now formed.
- Now color each triangle on one side of the hexagon. (Just use one color.)

- Repeat on the other side of the hexagon, using a different color.
- Flip the hexagon surfaces to expose more uncolored sides. There are six more uncolored sides. To flip the hexagon: a) fold back and forth along all the triangle lines (this makes the hexagon easier to flip); b) put both thumbs under unfolded edges of hexagon in the center of the hexagon; c) pull thumbs up and out to expose unmarked triangle sides.
- Color the exposed triangles a new color. It will take two or three flips to expose all six uncolored triangles.



Activity #7

Give your child a copy of the following information and have him fill it out.

Assertive Learning Skills

Pick a subject and an Assertive Learning Skill you are going to use in your class for a week. Write down specifically how you are going to use that Assertive Learning Skill. For example, if you choose 'Questioning,' you could write, "I will ask at least two questions in math every day."

You can also practice these skills at home. Give your child some task to perform and discuss together which of the assertive learning skills would apply best to this task. Have him work on the task for 15 minutes while he practices the skills he has chosen. Remind him that the more he uses these skills, the easier it will be and the better he will become. Make sure to praise him every time you see effort and improvement.

Tie it Together

Each of these Assertive Learning Skills can help your child take charge of his learning. These are the behaviors that he will need to develop to accompany his growing brain. He can probably slide through middle school and high school without a knowledge of how to be responsible for his behavior and learning, but life beyond high school is a totally different story. In order to be successful in life, he must learn how to take charge of his behavior and learning.