

Issue: **Disorganized Students**

Strategies to Consider:

Students of all ages struggle with organizational skills for many reasons and may include:

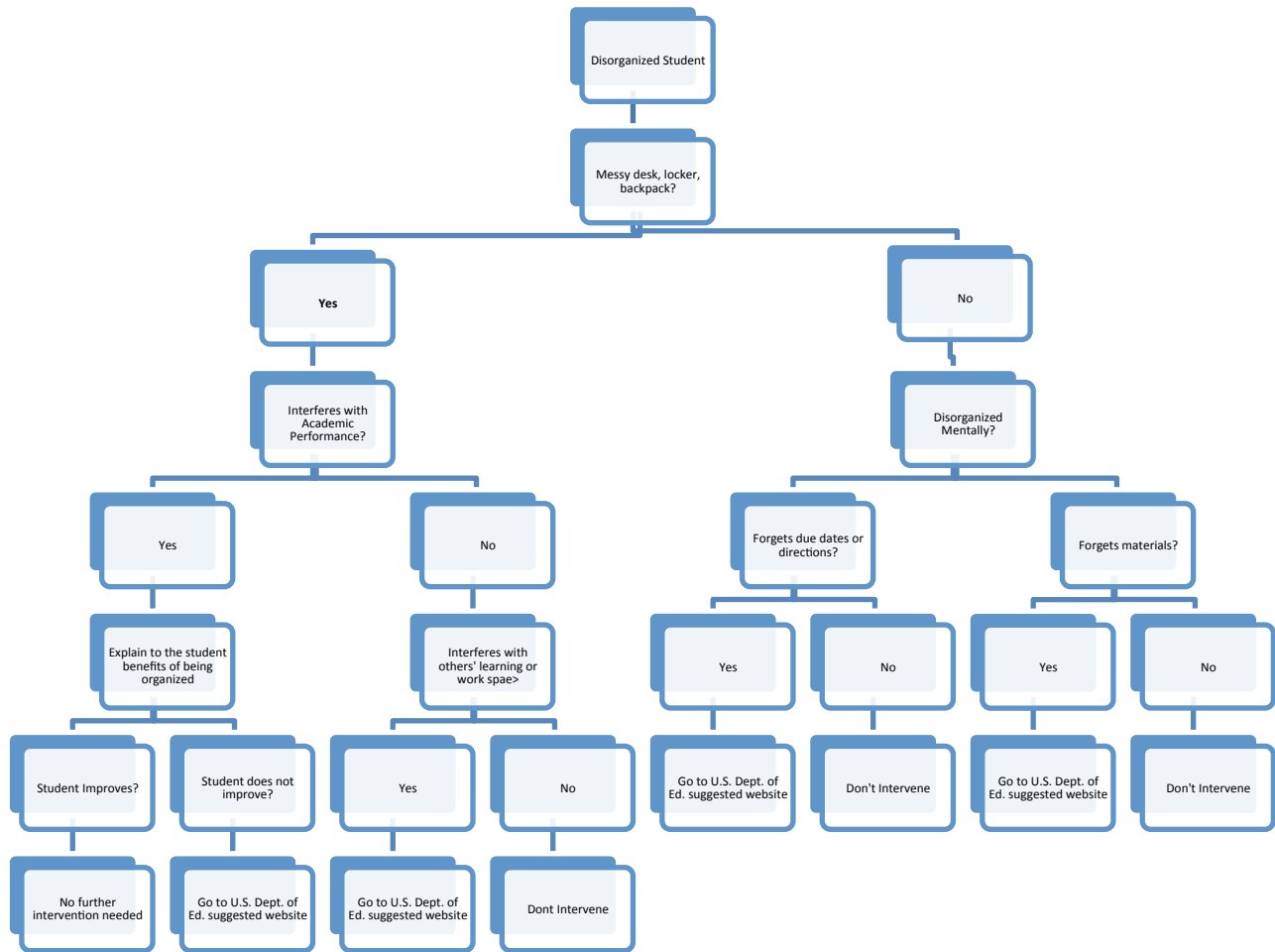
- Failure to learn (or be taught) organizational skills
- Immature brain development
- General developmental delays
- Attention problems (See [School-Based Behavioral Health: ADHD](#))
- Learning disabilities
- Side effects of certain medications
- Emotional and behavioral disorders
- Differences in cultural norms and family values

So what does a disorganized student look like? Disorganized students may tend to be forgetful and complete assignments too quickly and perhaps incorrectly. Such students be confused about assignments and unsure of classroom and school rules. They may have poor time management skills and a messy desk, locker, or backpack. Some become easily frustrated and might lose needed materials and supplies (e.g., homework, books, notebooks, pens, pencils, etc.). On the other hand, some students have messy desks, bookbags, and lockers but manage to do excellent work.

When is disorganization a problem? The appearance of a student whose belongings are messy can be frustrating for teachers, and students who exhibit such behaviors *may* be at risk for poor academic achievement. However, it is important to understand *that being physically organized does not necessarily equate with high academic achievement*. After all, we have all known someone whose office was messy but who was highly productive or a student with a messy desk, but who has very good grades. While many highly organized students are more likely to achieve academic success, it does not always mean that students who appear visibly disorganized are not also successful students. This misconception is further exacerbated by the high value one's society may place on being well organized and how we tend to view disorganization negatively.

While organizational skills generally are an important goal, the real goals here are *preparedness and productivity*. That is, can a student be prepared, productive, and successful while appearing to have a messy desk, notebook, or backpack? This is a question you need to consider before choosing an

appropriate intervention. When a student’s disorganization hinders his or her academic performance or that of other students, you must intervene by helping the student develop better organizational skills. The U.S. Department of Education website has compiled a wealth of strategies for building organizational and study skills with children with ADHD; however, this information can be used with all students (see link below). The following flow chart may be of assistance in deciding when and how you should intervene with a disorganized student:



As a teacher, you can facilitate organization by setting up your classroom for success. Consider implementing universal interventions or classroom-wide strategies used to support or change targeted behaviors. Additionally, a successful classroom environment is one that maximizes structure and predictability through increased teacher-directed activity and physical arrangements that minimize student distractions. By following specific routines, teachers can bring order to the classroom environment. Consider the following strategies, which can be used with students of all ages:

- Set up a classroom signal, or method for getting student's attention.
- Establish arrival, dismissal, and re-entry routines.
- Use advance organizers to reinforce routines, such as posting classroom and student schedules.
- Set up routines for transitions within the classroom.
- Have a plan for where students are to place their personal belongings.
- Have an inbox for work students are turning in and an outbox for work they are to pick up.

Post and teach classroom rules and expectations. Teachers often assume that students know what is expected of them when they may not. Create classroom rules and expectations that are clear, positively stated, enforceable, and reasonable. Be sure to include rules for different situations, such as hallways, bathrooms, playground, and the lunchroom. In addition, praise and precorrection can be used universally and with individual students, especially very young children.

Additionally, the following strategies may be of benefit to middle childhood and adolescent-age students struggling with disorganization:

- Assignment notebooks
- Color-coded folders
- Clean out desks, lockers, and backpacks regularly
- Subject-specific classroom visual aids (e.g., lists of commonly misspelled words or grammar rules)
- Individual calendars or daily activity schedules
- Practice note-taking skills
- Checklists (e.g., lists of frequently made student mistakes or needed homework supplies)
- Establishing an uncluttered workspace.

If you believe your student is having difficulty with their organizational skills, the reminders checklist below will help remind you, as a teacher, what you can do to help the student through their school day:

[Reminders Checklist for Disorganized Students](#)

Also consider:

[Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\) newsletter](#)

[Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\) study guide](#)

[Attention Deficit Hyperactivity podcast](#)

How my teachers can help me: student advocacy checklist - This checklist is a compilation of student-based suggestions regarding how to assist students struggling with disorganized behaviors.

Is ADHD masquerading In your family?

Praise In the classroom presentation

Precorrection powerpoint

Teaching children with ADHD: Instructional strategies and practices

Reminders Checklist for Disorganized Students

- _____ Student might need more time getting started on his/her work.
- _____ Have student sit close to the front of the classroom to keep his/her attention.
- _____ Check to make sure student is prepared. Does the student have the materials required?
- _____ Greet the student pleasantly. Help student get his/her day started off nicely.
- _____ Remind student of what we did last time.
- _____ Tell student what he/she will learn today.
- _____ Post what will be happening today.
- _____ Remind the student of the rules and the agreed-upon consequences.
- _____ Give the student only a few directions at a time.
- _____ Let the student sit next to a friend that will help he/her get started.
- _____ Give student a signal if he/she is doing well at the beginning of class.
- _____ Put a note on student's desk telling him/her what he/she will need to do this morning.
- _____ Clarify the rules of the class and the school (ex: no fighting, respect others, or no dangerous tools)
- _____ Post the rules on walls or other place that student can easily see them
- _____ Give student time to get into the classroom and warm up to me.
- _____ Have patience with student as he/she may take a little longer to get situated.
- _____ Remind student of class expectations.
- _____ Assist student with setting up his/her desk and area
- _____ Let student know the schedule/routine for the day and tell student about any schedule changes.