

# section

9

Social Skills Deficits in  
Children With NF1

## What Is Social Cognition?

Happiness in humans is strongly related to our social interaction. Our ability to have healthy social interactions is determined by our social cognition. Social cognition is the way in which we form impressions of ourselves and others and how these impressions influence our relationships. We use social cognition skills to determine the causes of behavior, both our own and that of others, and relate behavior to social rules.

Social cognition also dictates how our goals, feelings, and desires influence our interpretation and memory of our actions and social events. Our social cognition capacity is shaped by a combination of biological and environmental interactions (genetics, personality traits, culture, social groups, and family styles, among others).

## What We Know About Social Interaction Skills in Children With NF1

---

Parents and teachers alike recognize that children with neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1) may have problems with social interaction and making and keeping friends. These children often prefer to interact with older or younger children than with children of their own age, as their peers may find them to be socially immature. This difficulty with social interaction can significantly impact a child's quality of life.

Several researchers have reported that NF1 is highly associated with autistic traits and symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Social interaction deficits are common in children with ADHD and autism spectrum disorder.



## social interaction

### Do We Know What the Problem Is?

The exact cause of these social interaction deficits is unknown. A combination of deficits in executive function skills, such as cognitive flexibility, impulse control, and shifting attention, may be an important part. Intense anxiety can also increase the number and severity of social interaction deficits.

Scientists and doctors still have a lot to learn about the exact relationship between NF1 and social interaction difficulties. Information from parents like you is invaluable to their research and interpretation. Talk to your doctor about your observations and let them know what you believe are your child's biggest social challenges.

### What Treatment Is Available?

The following pages provide an overview of some of the most common treatment options for social interaction deficits. Some of these options may work better for some children than for others.

treatments  
are available

# social interaction

## Social Skills Support Groups

### Pros

- These groups may help affected children become aware of their problems in social interaction situations and “prepare” for the next time they face similar situations

### Cons

- Social interaction situations are unpredictable
- There is no guarantee that the situations encountered in therapy will be replicable in real-life encounters

## Parent Education and Training

### Pros

- Parents can learn how to intervene and help their children in social situations
- Exposure to support will last longer than social skills groups
- Parents can observe real-life situations and provide feedback in real time

### Cons

- Parents’ social interaction perceptions can be very different from those of a child’s peers
- Parental intervention may impact parent–child relations
- Children tend to behave in front of adults differently from how they behave in front of other children

# social interaction

## Medications

- For some patients, management of associated problems such as ADHD, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or depression may improve their social interaction
- Ask your doctor for more information

## Friendship Coaching

Friendship coaching involves organized one-on-one interactions with an adult serving as an observer without interfering.

### Pros

- It allows identification of real-life problems
- It is accessible and available as an in-home intervention

### Cons

- Friendship coaching requires that parents, caregivers, or adults in charge of the program understand the process and maintain an objective view of the problem
- It may not replicate group interaction
- Results vary widely



notes

Handwriting practice area consisting of 11 horizontal blue lines.



activity to share with your child

9



Print this page for your child!

## conversation starters

### There's always room for new friends!

But how do you make them? Saying hello, smiling, and being friendly is a great place to start. The next step is starting a conversation with someone. One of the easiest ways to start a conversation with someone new is to talk about your interests and to ask that person questions about his or her interests.

Sparx has made a list of questions below to help you start a conversation. Write down your responses. Then, choose a few of your favorite questions to ask someone new.

What is your favorite thing to do when you're not in school?

What's your favorite subject in school?

Are you in any team sports or clubs?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

What is the funniest thing you ever saw?

What is the best thing about you?

What is your favorite book or movie?

What is your favorite food?

What kind of music do you like?

If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?





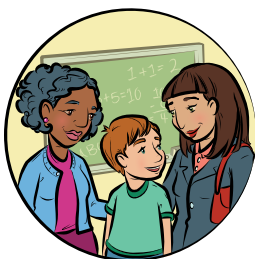
# section

10

**Building an Education Team:  
Bridging the Gap Between Home and School**

# Working Together: Parent-Teacher Communication

Parents and teachers need to work together to meet their common goal of making a child's education successful. It is important that teachers and parents understand how to support one another to meet this goal.



## Parents need teachers to

- explain their expectations and assignments clearly
- monitor each child's daily performance
- provide feedback
- be sensitive and responsive to a child's struggles with homework
- be flexible in addressing the accommodations or modifications a child may need



## Teachers need parents to

- share responsibility in the education of their child
- understand the teacher's responsibility to all students in the class
- keep in mind what is reasonable when making requests
- instruct their child to respect and follow the rules of the school and classroom
- communicate closely and openly with the teacher
- ensure that their child is coming to school prepared with books, materials, and homework
- cooperate in reinforcing appropriate behavior and work production goals
- treat the teacher with courtesy and respect

Please visit  
[ctf.org/education](http://ctf.org/education) to  
download or request the  
*NFI Guide for Educators*  
brochure to share with your  
child's school.



Print this page for your child!

# homework

## Twelve Steps to Successful Homework Completion

One way in which you can help your child receive the best educational experience possible is to support his or her education at home.

Here are 12 steps to successful homework completion:



### At school, the student

1. realizes an assignment is being given
2. writes down assignments
3. understands assignments
4. checks to see what to bring home at the end of the school day
5. brings home the assignments and necessary materials and textbooks



### At home, the student

6. begins the homework
7. completes the homework
8. checks the homework for accuracy
9. puts the completed homework in a notebook



### When the student returns to school, he or she must

10. take the homework back to school
11. keep track of it until the proper class
12. turn it in

# homework

## What Is the Homework Policy at Your Child's School?

To enable your child's success, ask questions to find out more about the homework policy at your child's school.

- What are the guidelines or homework policies for your school or school district?
- What are the teacher's expectations concerning homework?
- Is homework given every day?
- How much time should your child spend on homework each night?
- Does your school have programs to help students who are having trouble with homework?
- Are homework assignments available on the Internet?

## Understanding the Purpose of Homework

For younger children, homework provides students with an opportunity to develop independent work skills. For older children, homework reinforces learning and helps your child master specific skills.





## homework

### What Is the Parent's Role in the Homework Process?

---

It's normal for parents to have feelings of anxiety, guilt, and worry that make them feel responsible for the completion of their child's homework. However, your role in the completion of homework is supportive. If parents are too active in the homework process and take on the role of remembering and reminding their children of their assignments, the child may become dependent. He or she may even rely on parents to "rescue" their homework. A cycle of dependency can be created as school pressures and fears of failure mount. Parents may eventually feel burdened and resentful. For children to develop independent work skills, it's critical to avoid or break the cycle of dependency. Here are a few tips to help you provide the structure at home needed to facilitate the homework process.

#### Establish a homework routine.

- Agree on which days of the week will be set aside for homework
- Determine how long your child will work on his or her homework
- Set up a designated space where your child will do his or her homework
- Organize materials
- Allow for "brain breaks"
- Ensure your child understands his or her responsibilities
- Understand your responsibilities (that is, monitor the homework process)

provide structure

---

## homework

Create a homework space and include the following items:

- Mirror
- Timer
- Homework log sheet
- Fiddle toy
- Laminated list of homework buddies
- School classroom rules/procedures
- Backpack hook



Provide incentives to encourage homework skills.

- Use a token program to motivate your child to work on his or her homework
- Token charts (such as a dot-to-dot picture) may be used to track your child's daily progress
- Incentives for teens can include computer time, friend time, video games, or TV privileges
- Incentives can be tied into the plan by using earned allowance

Monitor the homework process.

- Monitoring is important to preventing potential lapses in the process
- The extent of monitoring will depend on the child's homework capabilities and the current homework expectations



Print this page for your child!

# homework

Your child's role in the completion of homework is active, and he or she must accept the responsibility for completing the task. A school-to-home tracker like the one featured below may help your child to adequately prepare for homework while at school and successfully complete homework when at home.

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_ Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Before I leave school each day, I will check to make sure I have done the following:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
1. Written down every assignment in my assignment book					
2. Collected and packed my books					
3. Gathered and packed all the materials I need to do my assignments					
4. Collected all notes needed to be seen by my parents					
5. Gathered and packed all my folders and notebooks					

Before I leave home in the morning, I will check to make sure I have the following:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
1. All of my completed assignments					
2. All books I need					
3. All materials I need for school					
4. All signed notes					

## homework

Teaching your child to record assignments on an assignment calendar worksheet may also help in the homework process.

For long-term assignments, have your child note the following on the calendar:

The date work is assigned

The date it is due

The times that he or she is going to work on the assignment

### How Much Is Too Much?

If the homework is a frequent cause of battles, tears, and frustration in your home, seek help! Let your child's teacher know your child's frustration tolerance in the evening. Request modifications and adjustments in his or her assignments.






## schoolwork

### What Your Child Should Know About Schoolwork

---

Ensure that your child understands that although neurofibromatosis is not an excuse for not doing schoolwork, it may be a reason for doing things differently. Completing homework is his or her responsibility, and it is important that homework comes first and fun comes later. Remind your child to use learning strategies and skills that have helped to make homework easier.



*Above all, encourage your child  
the effort itself is what counts!*



Print this page!

## daily checklist

### For Parents

#### School-to-Home Communication Daily Checklist

---

Keep this checklist in a place where you will see it every day, such as on your refrigerator or pinned to your family's calendar. This checklist will help you stay connected to your child's tasks, needs, and events in school.

- Check my child's schoolbag daily for any items that the school or teacher has sent home
- Read and refer to school district materials, such as back-to-school packets and core curriculum standards
- Make note of my child's big assignment due dates
- Mark special events on my calendar, such as library days, gym days, and field trips
- Read weekly or monthly letters from the teacher
- Use school-to-home trackers



activity to share with your child

10



Print this page for your child!

## homework mix-up

Today in school, Sparx has received a homework assignment, but he has forgotten all of the steps he needs to take to complete it. Help Sparx by cutting out all of the steps below and putting them in the correct order.

Keep track of my completed assignment until I'm in the right class	Check my assignment to make sure I've completed it and that it's accurate	Write down my assignment, when it's due, and what class it's for
Make sure to bring my completed assignment back to school	Finish my assignment	Realize that an assignment is being given to me
Give my completed assignment to the teacher	Put my completed assignment in a safe place, such as in a notebook	Bring home my assignment and any materials I need to work on it
Make a list of everything I need to bring home at the end of the school day so that I can work on my assignment	Start my assignment	Make sure I understand my assignment and ask any questions I have about it

The answer key to this puzzle is on the next page.



Print this page for your child!

## homework mix-up

### Answer Key

<b>1</b> Realize that an assignment is being given to me	<b>2</b> Write down my assignment, when it's due, and what class it's for	<b>3</b> Make sure I understand my assignment and ask any questions I have about it
<b>4</b> Make a list of everything I need to bring home at the end of the school day so that I can work on my assignment	<b>5</b> Bring home my assignment and any materials I need to work on it	<b>6</b> Start my assignment
<b>7</b> Finish my assignment	<b>8</b> Check my assignment to make sure I've completed it and that it's accurate	<b>9</b> Put my completed assignment in a safe place, like in a notebook
<b>10</b> Make sure to bring my completed assignment back to school	<b>11</b> Keep track of my completed assignment until I'm in the right class	<b>12</b> Give my completed assignment to the teacher