Designing a Work Environment

One of the things that commonly comes up when we're talking about helping children with attention difficulties is the work environment. Should we work in the bedroom? Do we want to work in the kitchen? Do we want to work near other students? Do we want to work in a quieter setting where there are fewer distractions? And the answer is that what you want to do is have your child work with you to design an environment to identify what work environment is best for them. And that work environment can vary depending upon the task. So, there are some things about work environment that I think are generally true.

You want to choose some work environment where there are not compelling distractions because even if you say no to the distraction, your brain must put out some effort to say no to the distractions even subconsciously. So, a work environment with fewer compelling distractions makes sense.

I know also that you want to develop a working environment that gives you the opportunity to position yourself properly. Lying on bed trying to study and do your work is not a good habit to develop. Sure, lying in bed to read the book might be OK. But that's matching the task to the work environment.

I know we want a work environment that's comfortably cool. Not too cold, not too warm. I think there's a reason why kids have trouble near the end of the year. While there are many reasons why kids struggle to stay focused and stay settled at the end of the school year, one of the reasons is classrooms may get warm.

We want a less distracting environment, an environment that is comfortable but where you are positioned to pay attention. Positioned in ready mode. We want an environment that is comfortably cool. We also want to consider an environment where there are other people on task. Working in the kitchen while your son is doing homework at the kitchen table can be an effective work environment as long as long as there aren't other significant competing distractions like TV in the family room.

In schools, the work environments can vary. I have students that will take some work to the back of the classroom; some work that they do next to a partner who is also on task; some work that they take to the library or to another classroom where it's quieter, and students are more likely to be on task. We can select work environments to match the task.

The most important thing though is to experiment and think about what work environment is most effective for your son or daughter and not assume that the same work environment. Is useful for every single task. Experiment, play around with the idea and help design these work environments.