

Homework Therapists' Job: Help Solve Math Problems, and Emotional Ones

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On a recent Sunday, Bari Hillman, who works during the week as a clinical psychologist at a New York mental health clinic, was perched at a clear, plastic desk inside a 16-year-old's Manhattan bedroom, her shoeless feet resting on a fluffy white rug. Dr. Hillman was helping a private school sophomore manage her outsize worry over a long-term writing project. The student had taped the project outline on the wall above the desk, at Dr. Hillman's prodding. It was designed to serve both as a reminder that the project was due, and an empowering indicator of progress.

Dr. Hillman mused about the way worry can morph into unhealthy avoidance, the cathartic power of deep breathing and the soothing nature of to-do lists.

Dr. Hillman, 30, represents a new niche in the \$100 billion tutoring industry. Neither a traditional tutor nor a straight-up therapist, she is an amalgam of the two. "Homework therapists," as they are now sometimes called, administer academic help and emotional support as needed. Via Skype, email and text, and during pricey one-on-one sessions, they soothe cranky students, hoping to steer them back to the path of achievement.

The service is not cheap. Parents in New York generally pay between \$200 and \$600 for regularly scheduled in-person sessions that range from 50 to 75 minutes. This on top of the hefty fees New York mothers and fathers already pay to help their children get ahead, or just stay on pace, from coaching for kindergarten gifted and talented tests, to subject tutoring, SAT prep and help with writing their college essays.