

Help Your Child Get the Most Out of Homework

Children may grumble about it and parents may be intimidated by it, but homework does improve grades and make children better readers. Homework also teaches children to be self-disciplined and responsible.

The parent's role in getting children to do homework is crucial. But parents are sometimes uneasy about getting involved – especially if they themselves do not understand their children's learning skills. Working together, parents and teachers can help children develop good study habits and encourage them to become lifelong learners.

Q. Why do teachers assign homework?

A. Teachers give homework assignments to reinforce and extend topics that have been covered in class. Research studies show that homework, when it is returned and commented upon or graded, can improve grades and achievement dramatically. Teachers see homework as an important link between the home and the school. Homework is an important way parents can keep up with what their children are studying.

Q. How much time should my children spend each night on homework?

A. In the lowest grades – kindergarten to third grade – very little homework should be given, no more than 20 minutes a day. In grades four through six, a child should be expected to spend 20 to 40 minutes a day.

There is no set amount of time for junior high and senior high students. The amount of homework will vary by the subjects students are taking. If you think your children are getting too much or too little homework, discuss your concerns with the teacher. Ask your children's teacher how much time they expect students to spend on assignments daily. Find out if your school has a homework policy. If it does, make sure that you and your children understand that policy.

Q. What can I do to help my children with their homework?

A. Parents can do many things to ready their children for homework assignments and it's never too early to start. Starting when children are young, set aside a "quiet time" each afternoon or evening for reading, letter writing, and games. Setting this pattern – creating a regular quiet time – will help your children get into the homework habit.

Make it easy for your children to work on out-of-class assignments. Set up a quiet, comfortable area with everything your child might need – dictionary, pencils, paper, good lighting, a place to store materials. A desk in a bedroom is ideal. The kitchen table is fine as long as everyone knows that when it's homework time, it's quiet time. Some children find they can work productively while lounging on the floor. Allow children to study in a way that they learn best.

Q. Should I forbid listening to music or television while my children are doing their homework?

A. See what works best for each child. Some students have no trouble concentrating with a radio or stereo on while others find it distracting. Television is another matter. Teachers strongly discourage allowing students to study in front of the television.

Q. How much should I get involved with my children's homework assignments?

A. Ideally, being at home while your children are studying helps show that you think homework is important. How involved you get with actual homework assignments depends on your children's grades and achievements. Usually the younger the child, the more guidance is needed.

If you cannot be at home while your children do homework, ask to see the homework and discuss it with them when you arrive home. Make a contract with your children. For example, if your youngsters complete their homework, they will be able to choose something fun to do.

Elementary school students often need extra help. If your child has been given a work sheet, for example, make sure the child understands the directions. Do the first few together, then watch your child do the next problem or two. When your child is finished, check the assignment. Praise the child's correct responses, and point out errors so they can be corrected.

Many parents feel uncomfortable with their children's schoolwork. That's even more reason to stay in touch with your children's teachers. Teachers can ease your anxiety and offer suggestions on how you can help your children learn.

In the upper grades, you may become less involved with daily assignments, but you still need to know what's expected. Meet each of your child's teachers and ask what kind of assignments will be given. When your school sponsors an open house, make a point to attend to find out more about your children's course work. Teachers frequently describe what they'll cover in their courses and their homework policies during open house.

Q. One of my children tries hard but is still having problems with homework assignments. What should I do?

A. First of all, make certain your child is comfortable asking the teacher about an assignment or anything else that he or she doesn't understand. If your child understands the work that has been assigned but is still feeling frustrated, take note. That may mean special help is needed. Ask for a meeting with the teacher. The two of you need to work out a plan to help meet your child's needs.

Q. Is it normal for my children to sometimes seem bored by homework assignments?

A. It's natural for students to grumble and complain about homework. But if your children continually seem bored by homework assignments, talk with your children's teacher.

If a child considers math homework exercises too easy or too hard, for instance, raise that point with the child's teacher. Teachers want students to benefit from homework assignments. By making the teacher aware of the situation, you will help the teacher better match assignments with student ability and maturity levels.

Q. When I ask my children if they have homework, they say that it is finished already. How can I make sure they're doing their work?

A. Make homework a daily habit. Don't ask your children "Do you have any homework tonight?" Assume that your children have homework to do every night. At the elementary level you may want your children to present their homework to you so that you can check it over, sign and date it.

Q. Should I reward my children for completing assignments or getting good grades?

A. We all like to know when we're doing a good job, and children are no exception. Reinforce your children's academic efforts with praise – often. Make praise a habit.

However, be cautious about offering money or gifts as rewards. Most educators prefer to see parents reinforce student efforts in some nonmaterial way. The next time your child does a good job on a school project, perhaps plan a special family activity as a reward.

Homework Hints

- ☆ Check to see that your children understand assignments. If there is a problem, work through an example with them.
- ☆ Sign and date your young children's homework. Teachers appreciate it when they know that the parents are interested enough to check over their children's homework and see that it is finished.
- ☆ Follow up on homework assignments by asking to see your children's homework after it has been returned by the teacher. Look at the teacher's comments to see if your children have done the assignments correctly.
- ☆ Contact the teacher if you don't understand the assignments or your child has a special problem. This is a common problem among parents, so don't hesitate to contact the teacher.
- ☆ Look for homework daily. Assume that your children have homework to do every day. For students at the elementary level, ask to check and sign it.
- ☆ Resist doing your children's homework for them. Work with them and encourage them to do the work themselves.
- ☆ Try to be home and available during homework time so that your children know that you value homework as another part of their education.
- ☆ Be sure to praise your children for a job well done. Encourage the good work that your children do and comment about improvements they have made.

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