



Resource 5

All About Homework

Use this guide to help you support your child with homework.

Why do teachers give homework?

Teachers use homework:

- to inform parents what is being taught at school so it can be reinforced at home;
- to help students understand and review the work that has been covered in class;
- to see whether students understand the lesson; and
- to help students learn how to find and use more information on a subject.

Research shows that when homework is turned in to the teacher, graded and discussed with students, it can improve students' grades and understanding of their schoolwork.

How much time should my child spend each night on homework?

Most educators agree that:

- for students in grades K-2, homework is more effective when it does not exceed 10-20 minutes each school day;
- older students, in grades 3-6, can handle 30-60 minutes a day; and
- in junior and senior high school, the amount of homework will vary by subject. Most older students will also have homework projects, such as research papers and oral reports that may have deadlines weeks away. They may need help organizing assignments and planning work times to make sure homework is ready to turn in on time.

Your children's teachers can tell you how much time they expect students to spend on homework. Teachers try to assign homework that is meaningful and relevant to the day's lesson. Teachers also try to take into account how much homework has been assigned in the student's other subjects and the time that it may take when all the other classes are added up.

Ask your principal if your school or school district has a homework policy. If it does, make sure you and your children know and understand that policy.

How can I help with homework?

There are several ways you can help:

- Send your children to school each day, well-rested, fed and with a positive outlook.
- Take an active interest in your child's schooling. Ask questions about what happened at school each day and how your child feels about it.
- Try not to let your own negative experiences keep you from supporting and encouraging your child's learning. Let them know how much you care about education by continuing your own learning and impress its importance upon them.
- If possible, set up a quiet, comfortable study area with good lighting and the school supplies your child needs. This can be almost anyplace in your home; you don't need a special room.
- Set a family "quiet time" where you and your child can work together on homework, reading, letter writing and playing games.
- Allow your child to study in the way that helps him/her learn best. For example, some children work best when they're lying on the floor with background music playing.
- Make homework a daily activity and help your child develop good homework habits.

Can my child do homework while listening to music or watching television?

Some students can work with a radio or CD on, while others must work in silence. Television can be a big problem. Many teachers ask that the television be turned off while the student is doing homework.

Research shows that American children, on average, spend far more time watching television than doing homework. It's best to leave the television off during homework time.

How much help should I give?

This depends on the child's grade level and study habits. Younger students often need extra homework help. First, make sure the child understands the directions. Do a few problems together, then watch your child do a few. When your child is finished, check the work. Praise right answers, and show how to correct mistakes.

Avoid doing your child's homework for him/her. Teachers need to see where your child is having trouble.

One of the most helpful things you can do is to show your child that you think homework is important. Many children today do their homework while their parents are at work. When you are at home, ask to see your child's homework and discuss it with him or her. Ask questions and be supportive.

What if I don't understand my child's assignment?

Today's students may have subjects that you never had or that you didn't like when you were in school. You can still help your child by praising progress, getting help from a public library or homework hot line and talking with the teachers. You don't have to be an expert in a subject to help with homework. There are many places to go for help.

Do teachers really want me to ask them questions about homework?

Teachers want children to learn and want parents and families to be involved in their children's education. When you stay in touch with your child's teachers, they can ease your worries and offer homework tips and ideas on how you can help your child learn. Meet each of your child's teachers and ask what kind of homework will be given. This is very important, even if you have children in middle or high school.

Early in the school year and regularly, ask teachers about your child's subjects and homework policies. For example, ask what books your child will be using, what kinds of assignments will be given and when the teacher is available to answer questions.

My child tries hard but still has problems with homework. What can I do to help?

There could be a number of reasons for your child's trouble. Suggest that the child ask the teacher for extra help before or after school. Tell your child to ask the teacher about homework or anything else he or she doesn't understand. Set a time to meet with the teacher to discuss the problem. You may need to meet again during the year to check on how your child is doing.

If your child understands the work but is still having trouble, ask for a meeting with the teacher. The two of you should work out a plan to meet your child's needs.



My child seems bored by homework. Is this normal?

It's normal for students not to want to do their homework. But if your child always seems bored or unhappy, you need to try to find out the reason by talking with your child. Then talk with the teacher to come up with a solution.

Teachers want students to learn from homework. Tell the teacher if your child thinks the homework is too easy or too hard. This will help the teacher match the homework with your child's ability and skill level.

When I ask my child if he/she has homework, they say that it's finished or that there is none. How do I make sure my child is really doing his/her work?

Make studying, as well as homework, a daily habit. Students can always review lessons, read a book or work on practice exercises during quiet time, even if they don't have homework. Ask younger children to show you their homework so that you can check it, sign it and date it. Teachers like to see that adults have checked children's homework. If your child's school has a homework hot line, call it to check for the day's assignments. If your child often has no homework to do, you should let the teacher know.

Don't ask your child if he or she has homework each night — assume that there is homework or studying to do.

What if my child still isn't turning homework in?

State clearly and strongly to your child that you expect homework to be done and turned in to the teacher. Let your child know you will not tolerate homework that is incomplete.

Don't wait until grades come out to find out if the problem has been solved. You may need weekly contact with the teacher until your child develops good homework habits.

Should I reward my child for doing homework or for getting good grades?

Children like to know when they've done a good job. Your approval means a lot. Praise your child's work often. Show pride when your child does their best, regardless of the grade.

Be careful about giving money or gifts as rewards. Most teachers want parents to reward students' work in other ways. The next time your child does a good job on a school project, plan a special family activity as a reward.

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