

Getting Homework Done at Home



Homework may be one of the biggest challenges a parent faces on a nightly basis. After all, having sat in school for six long hours, the last thing your child wants to do is sit down some more and focus on math, reading, social studies, or spelling. He/she wants to play, watch TV, go on the computer, etc.

Unfortunately, homework is a necessary evil in a child's life, enabling him/her to retain and refine what was taught in class that day. This means that it's a necessary part of your life, as a parent, too.

That being said, homework shouldn't be something both you and your child dread; it shouldn't be akin to warfare, at least not every night. Taking into account the following tips can help make sure it's not.

ESTABLISH ROUTINE

If homework falls at 6 p.m. one night and 4:30 p.m. the next or even 7 a.m. in a rush before school, your child won't make homework a consistent, healthy habit. Nor will he/she be able to establish a routine if the location of homework switches from, say, the kitchen table to in front of the television depending on the evening. You need to set up a routine for your child. Here's how:

1. *Choose a set homework time for each night*—maybe before or after dinner. Enforce this time

not wavering, barring extenuating circumstances.

2. *Create a homework-conducive environment.* Your child should not be tackling the times tables with the TV on and 10 million other things buzzing around him. You want a quiet, calm place where he/she can buckle down and get work done.

3. *Create a homework schedule.* Though the assignments will change daily, you and your child can come up with a routine for getting started. Create a schedule in which,

perhaps, you and your child review the assignments, your child completes each assignment beginning with math and ending with reading, and you and your child double-check once he/she has finished.

BE INVOLVED

It's important that the parent is also involved in the homework process, as in the aforementioned homework schedule. However, you also don't want to be too involved. It is, after all, your child's learning, not yours, in practice. Here's how to maintain balance:

1. *Step in, in the beginning.* Go over the assignments with your child, helping him/her to read the instructions, particularly if he/she has difficulty reading. Make sure your child understands and can explain what he/she will do with each assignment.

2. *Monitor but don't do your child's homework.* As your child works, check in to make he/she is doing okay. Answer questions he/she has and provide advice, as necessary, but do not solve the problem for him/her. That won't lead to learning.

3. *Review the homework with your child.* However, also keep in mind that it is not your job to correct every mistake on your child's homework. Forcing perfection is not always the best way to ensure a confident, well-learned student.

4. *Talk to the teacher.* If you have concerns about the amount of homework or the struggles your child is having, contact his/her teacher. Speak with him/her about what you can do at home.

GET CREATIVE

While you want to establish routine and structure in your child's homework habit, you don't want to negate any and all creativity. Incentives, breaks, and other activities can make homework a little less painful for everyone involved.

1. *Short-term incentives go a long way.* If your child completes all of his homework without complaining, for example, he/she can enjoy TV time before bed.

2. *Long-term incentives aren't a bad idea, either.* Try creating a contract in which your child completes all of his/her homework for a month and receives a special prize or trip.

3. *Allow for breaks.* Depending on your child's ability to focus and the amount of homework he/she has, you may want to schedule in some break time. It's hard enough for an adult to sit still for 20 minutes; it's harder for a child.

Following these steps won't necessarily make for smooth and easy homework time, but it should help. If your child has additional struggles that compound doing homework, check with his/her education team to see what else can be done. However, the above tips are fairly universal. ■

Information for this patient handout was gathered from:

- Healthy Children, "Homework Tips for Parents of Children with ADHD," <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Homework-Tips-for-Parents-of-Children-with-ADHD.aspx?nfstatus=401&nftoken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&nftatusdescription=ERROR%3a+No+local+token>
- Family Education, "Homework Tips for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities," <http://school.familyeducation.com/homework/parenting/38545.html>
- NASP Resources, "Homework: A Guide for Parents," http://www.nasponline.org/resources/home_school/homework.aspx
- U.S. Department of Education, "Homework Tips for Parents," http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/homework/part_pg2.html#2