

Developing Good Homework Habits

Help your child develop good homework habits. That means designating a regular location and time to work on daily assignments. She does not necessarily need a desk in her room; the kitchen table can work just as well. No matter what place you choose, it needs to be well lit and quiet, without the distractions of the television set, other children playing, or people talking on the telephone. Keep your child's materials (paper, pencil, dictionary) nearby so she can get started quickly and on her own each afternoon or evening.

Some children get right down to work without much encouragement. Others need help making the transition from playing to a homework frame of mind. Sometimes providing a ten-minute warning is all it takes to help a child get ready mentally as well as to move to the place she intends to work.

There is no universally right time to do homework. In some families, children do best if they tackle their homework shortly after returning home from school in the mid afternoon; other youngsters may do best if they devote the after-school hours to unwinding and playing, leaving their homework until the evening, when they may feel a renewed sense of vigor. Let your child have some say in the decision making. Homework can often become a source of conflict between parent and child—"Johnny, why can't you just do your homework without arguing about it?"—but if you agree on a regular time and place, you can eliminate two of the most frequent causes of homework-related dissension.

Some parents have found that their children respond poorly to a dictated study time (such as four o'clock every afternoon). Instead, youngsters are given guidelines ("No video games until your homework is done"). Find out what works best for both your child and the family as a whole. Once this is determined, stick with it.

Some youngsters prefer that a parent sit with them as they do their homework. You may find this an acceptable request, particularly if you have your own reading or paperwork to complete. However, do not actually do the homework for your child. She may need some assistance getting focused and started and organizing her approach to the assignment. Occasionally, you may need to explain a math problem; in those cases, let your child try a couple of problems first before offering to help. But if she routinely requires your active participation to get her everyday homework done, then talk to her teacher. Your child may need stronger direction in the classroom so that she is able to complete the assignments on her own or with less parental involvement. One area where children may need parental help is in organizing how much work will have to be done daily to finish a long assignment, such as a term paper or a science project.

If your child or her teacher asks you to review her homework, you may want to look it over before she takes it to school the next morning. Usually it is best if homework remains the exclusive domain of the child and the teacher. However, your input may vary depending on the teacher's philosophy and the purpose of homework. If the teacher is using homework to check your child's understanding of the material—thus giving the teacher an idea of what needs to be emphasized in subsequent classroom teaching sessions—your suggestions for changes and

improvements on your child's paper could prove misleading. On the other hand, if the teacher assigns homework to give your child practice in a particular subject area and to reinforce what has already been taught in class, then your participation can be valuable. Some teachers use homework to help children develop self-discipline and organizational and study skills. Be sure to praise your youngster for her efforts and success in doing her homework well.

In general, support your child in her homework, but do not act as a taskmaster. Provide her with a quiet place, supplies, encouragement, and occasional help—but it is her job to do the work. Homework is your youngster's responsibility, not yours.

As the weeks pass, keep in touch with your child's teacher regarding homework assignments. If your youngster is having ongoing problems—difficulty understanding what the assignments are and how to complete them—or if she breezes through them as though they were no challenge at all, let the teacher know. The teacher may adjust the assignments so they are more in sync with your youngster's capabilities.

Whether or not your child has homework on a particular night, consider reading aloud with her after school or at night. This type of shared experience can help interest your child in reading, as well as give you some personal time with her. Also, on days when your child does not have any assigned homework, this shared reading time will reinforce the habit of a work time each evening.

To further nurture your child's love of reading, set a good example by spending time reading on your own, and by taking your youngster to the library and/or bookstore to select books she would like to read. Some families turn off the TV each night for at least thirty minutes, and everyone spends the time reading. As children get older, one to two hours may be a more desirable length of time each day to set aside for reading and other constructive activities.

As important as it is for your child to develop good study habits, play is also important for healthy social, emotional, and physical growth and development. While encouraging your child to complete her assignments or do some additional reading, keep in mind that she has already had a lengthy and perhaps tiring day of learning at school and needs some free time. Help her find the play activities that best fit her temperament and personality—whether it is organized school sports or music lessons, free-play situations (riding her bike, playing with friends), or a combination of these.

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