

HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH HOMEWORK

Children who, for one reason or another, are unable or unwilling to do their homework are often just assumed to be lazy. But in most cases, that simply isn't so. Many children who do well in school have difficulty "getting it together" for homework. Calling a child lazy may only make the problem worse. Be patient! If an assignment is genuinely difficult, your child is already suffering enough. He or she does want to learn and yearns to do well.

There are no perfect solutions to homework problems - - but parents can make a difference. Many experts feel that too much help may make a child overly dependent, negative or defiant, while ignoring the problem can lead to even greater difficulties as he or she falls behind in school.

It's important, first of all, to recognize the problem and offer help when needed. Be alert for a negative change in attitude toward school and homework, and make yourself available to help with assignments that are genuinely difficult for your child. But be careful not to go overboard and assume the child's responsibility. Jane M. Healy, author of *"Your Child's Growing Mind"* offers some suggestions for parents on offering tactful, constructive help to a child who is struggling with homework.

Set up a proper study area. To do homework successfully, your children must have a quiet place in which to work. Homework will seem easier for them if they are not sitting in front of the TV, talking on the phone or constantly being bothered by siblings or

the family dog. Older children may prefer doing homework away from the rest of the family, while younger children want you nearby. Your child needs a well-lit, quiet place to study, a regular routine and a moratorium on TV until homework is completed.

Provide the tools necessary for success. Equip the study area with a "homework survival kit". This should contain all the materials children need to do their homework and prevents them from being continually distracted by the need to go searching for supplies. The basics include pencils, pen, paper, ruler, scissors, and markers. Older students may also need a tape recorder, typewriter or word processor, calculator, dictionary and access to a library or Internet.

Establish a daily homework time. Set aside planned time each day during which your children must do homework or read. Some families find it works best to do homework as soon as the children get home or before dinner. Other families wait until after dinner. Establish a routine that works for your family.

Wait to be asked. If neither your child nor his teachers ask for your help, it probably is not needed. Trying to force a child to work with you may short-circuit his desire to come to you with problems in the future.

Be available and supportive when help is requested. Your attitude toward homework will shape your child's attitude. If a TV program is more

important to you than her need to practice multiplication tables, don't be surprised if she decides the same.

Focus on process, not product. Make the ultimate product (the right answer or the perfect paragraph) secondary to the actual process of learning. Praise your child for working through a difficult process.

The final product must represent the pupil's work. Don't deprive your child of valuable learning because you're afraid of a bad grade. Homework is the student's responsibility - - and after all, you won't be invited to go to college with your child.

Children are often harder than they would like us to believe. If your child complains about unreasonably long assignments, check the following: Can she organize time effectively? Are study times at school used productively? Are telephone conversations interfering? Does he work through the homework extremely slowly? Is she easily distracted? If the child is truly overloaded, a conference with the teacher should be scheduled.

Let him fight his own battles whenever possible. Your moral support is essential, but it is the student's job to learn what people (including teachers) expect of him.

Talk to your child's teacher about his or her philosophy on homework. Ask about the teacher's expectations of homework. How is it graded? How long should the child be expected to spend on homework each night? What should you do if you and your child cannot understand the homework? How neat

should the homework be?

You don't have to know everything.

Parents feel uncomfortable when they don't know all the answers, but admitting your confusion and working through problems with your child may be the best teaching you can do. Even if you don't get the answer, you are working together to solve the problem - - and that is the basis for the most lasting learning.

Praise your children. *As a parent, you have a tremendous influence on your children's sense of self-esteem. What you say or don't say can make a big difference in how your children feel about themselves. Don't underestimate the power of your encouragement, support and praise.*

Diana Converse, M. S., Family Life Educator
University of Florida Extension Service
5339 S. County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584
(813) 744-5519 x 140

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