

# Understood

## Homework Anxiety: What You Need to Know

By Jerome Schultz, PhD

Does your child seem to spend more time worrying about homework than actually doing it? Homework anxiety isn't unusual, and it isn't necessarily bad. In fact, a little bit of worry can be a motivator: "I know this is hard, but I'm pretty sure I can do it."

But when kids feel a *lot* of stress or anxiety, it can have the opposite effect.

Anxiety turns on the fear centers of the brain. That can cause kids to see homework as something they should avoid. But putting it off can create even more anxiety. As bedtime looms closer, and there's less and less time to do the work, worries snowball.

Learn more about homework anxiety and how you can help your child cope.

## What Causes or Contributes to Homework Anxiety

Homework anxiety can start in early grade school and affect any child. But it's an especially big issue for kids who are struggling in school. Here are some of the factors that can lead kids to become anxious about homework:

- **Lack of homework strategies and support:** Kids need to know or believe they can actually do the homework that's assigned. If they're struggling and don't have a work-around or accommodation for challenges, they may feel anxious about having to do certain tasks.
- **Falling behind peers:** When kids feel like they're not keeping up or aren't as good at school as other kids, homework is just another hurdle. It's also a reminder that things may not be going well.
- **Test prep:** Homework that helps kids prepare for a test makes it sound very important. This can raise stress levels, which can affect short-term and long-term memory. Some kids may respond to this kind of pressure by refusing to do test-related homework. This will give them an excuse if they fail: "I'm not stupid. I just forgot to do the homework."
- **Anxiety issues:** Kids who struggle with general anxiety tend to worry about lots of things, and this can certainly get in the way during homework.
- **Emotional regulation:** For kids who easily get flooded by emotions, homework can be a trigger for anxiety.
- **Perfectionism:** Some kids who do really well in a subject may worry that their work "won't be good enough."

## Ways to Help Reduce Homework Anxiety

It can be exhausting trying to coax or nag your worried child to finally sit down and get started. If homework battles have become a routine, reach out to your child’s teacher or guidance counselor. You can work together to find out what it is about the homework that feels so overwhelming to your child.

One way the teacher can help is by clearly connecting the new homework assignment to the work that’s done in class. For example, the teacher can “prime the homework pump” by having students do the first two homework problems in class. Then, the teacher can point out that the rest of the problems are pretty much like the first two.

**Use rating scales.** This is a common strategy to help kids track their anxiety levels. You or the teacher can ask your child to look at the homework assignment and answer three questions about it:

<b>Time</b>	<b>Difficulty</b>	<b>Ability</b>
How long do you think this homework will take to complete? (Then help your child keep track of the time actually spent on homework.)	How hard do you think it will be for you to complete this homework? Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the easiest and 5 being the hardest.	How likely is it that you’ll be able to complete the assignment? Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for “I’ll breeze through it” and 5 for “I don’t even know how to get started.”

Then the next day, you or the teacher can ask how accurate your child was in making these predictions. Rating scales can help kids see that the assignment took less time and wasn’t as hard as they thought it would be. They can also be part of a larger effort to help kids develop a growth mindset.

Rating scales can help even if they’re only done at home. But they’re much more powerful if the school uses them, too. With practice, kids can learn to use rating scales on their own. Building this kind of self-awareness can help break the cycle of homework anxiety. And for kids who struggle in school, rating scales can also shed light on whether they need more instruction or support.

**Set time limits on homework.** Many schools use the “10-minute rule”—that’s 10 minutes per grade level. If your child doesn’t finish in that amount of time, send the teacher an email. Some teachers give parents a chart to take notes on how much time and effort their child put in.

Reassure your child that it’s OK to stop working for the night. Help your child understand that sleep can affect how kids learn. Your child needs to be alert the next day to get schoolwork done. Sleep also plays a role in how kids cope with stress.

Looking for more homework tips and strategies? Explore solutions to other kinds of homework challenges. And watch an expert explain how to reduce your child’s homework stress.

## About the Author



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**Mon Sep 09 at  
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**Reading  
Interventions  
and  
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