

STEPS TO Homework Success



When your children do homework, they reinforce what they learned at school and expand their knowledge. But they learn more than the information in their assignments—they also build study skills and habits that they'll need throughout school and life.

Here are ways you can provide support and help your youngsters succeed with their homework.

BEFORE

Create a study area

Many children work best in a special study area, such as at a bedroom desk or the kitchen table. However, some youngsters do better sprawled on the living room floor or sitting on their bed. Consider letting your child decide where he'll work—he's more likely to stay on task when he's comfortable. Regardless, his work area should have adequate lighting and homework supplies, such as pens, pencils, paper, a ruler, a calculator, and a dictionary.

Get assignments

Remind your youngster that it's her job to write down assignments in school. She may need to copy them from the board or write them in her agenda as her teacher talks. When she gets home, check that she has the instructions and handouts she needs—you'll help her get in the habit of bringing home her assignments the day they're given.



Make a daily plan

Glance over your child's homework, and help him come up with a study plan. You might suggest that he tackle tougher or

longer assignments first while he's fresh and alert. He should be able to follow most homework instructions without supervision, but let him know you're available to discuss them.

Break projects into steps

Encourage your youngster to use a calendar to stay on schedule as she works on a project. Have her divide each project into steps and write them on the calendar. A science project, for example, might include steps like: develop hypothesis, conduct experiment, record results, write lab report. *Tip:* She may need your help breaking assignments into chunks and choosing deadlines.



Team with teachers

Ask your child's teacher about homework rules and how she would like you to help (or not help) him. Find out what kinds of assignments your youngster should expect. Provide your phone number and email address, and encourage the teacher to contact you if problems arise. The sooner you are aware of an issue, the more quickly a solution can be found.

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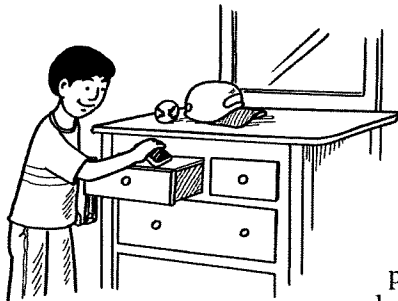
DURING

Keep a routine

Starting homework at the same time each day can make learning a habit for your child. Have her try a couple of different times to see what works best. Possibilities include immediately after school, before dinner (but after she has had time to play), or after dinner.

Increase concentration

Some youngsters need calm surroundings to focus on homework. Others may study better with background music. But television is too much for anyone to ignore. Your child



should keep the set off during study time so his mind is tuned in to his homework. Likewise, if he has a cell phone or a handheld video game system, have him turn it off and put it out of sight so that he isn't distracted during homework time.

Have family quiet time

Whenever possible, try to match your household's schedule with your youngster's study time. If homework is done from 7 to 8 p.m. each day, make this a quiet time for the entire family. Do paperwork or read alongside your child while she studies. This will help her stay focused.

Provide support

If your youngster is stuck, guide him in the right direction rather than providing the answers. For example, instead of answering his question, "Mom, how many feet are in a mile?" ask, "How do you think you can figure that out?" Your child will learn to work independently and to problem-solve. *Tip:* When he would benefit from your assistance, offer to pitch in. For instance, you could quiz him on spelling words or multiplication facts.

Give reminders

A simple prompt ("Finished that poem?") may be all that's needed to encourage your youngster to complete a project. But watch for signs that she's frustrated or seems to be spending too much time on her homework. If she consistently has trouble finishing assignments, ask her teacher for advice.



AFTER

Check homework

Take a moment to inspect your child's work when he's finished. Knowing that you will be looking at his assignments increases the chance that he will finish them *and* do his best. Check to see that his work is neat and complete. If you find several misspelled words or calculation errors, ask him to look over it again. But you shouldn't correct his work—that's his responsibility. Plus, mistakes show the teacher where your youngster needs help.

Boost confidence

Praising hard work as you notice it encourages your child to keep learning. A warm comment ("Nice job on those division problems") can give her confidence when she tackles her next assignment. Remember, the right attitude can make a big difference!



Find ways to improve

When graded homework is returned, look for the teacher's notes. These tell you if your youngster understood the assignment or where he went wrong. If he received a poor grade, ask him to think about the reasons. Did he copy the assignment correctly? Did he follow the instructions? Discovering what went wrong can keep him from repeating mistakes.

Talk about learning

You can stay up to date on what your child is learning in school by talking with her regularly about her homework. For instance, during dinner you could ask, "How is your geography project coming along? What have you discovered so far?" Or while you're in the car, the two of you might look for words on that week's vocabulary list and discuss their meanings.

Save assignments

Help your youngster create a system for filing returned homework. He might keep each subject in a different color folder. Then, he can use the papers to study for tests and quizzes. *Idea:* Suggest that he post ones he did especially well on—they can be a source of encouragement when he struggles with an assignment.

Tip: The key is for you to stay involved and monitor your child's homework without doing it for her. With your guidance and encouragement, your youngster will learn how to work independently and plan for success.

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