



SPEAC Meeting: Homework Without Headaches “Homework Tips and Tools” Wednesday, October 19, 2011

Homework Tips for Reluctant Students

Question: My eight-year-old doesn't want to do his homework. He doesn't have too much to do and all the other kids in his class seem to handle the assignments. He just puts it off until right before bedtime. He also has a tendency to accidentally leave his reading book at school and forgets to bring his sheets home.

Both his dad and I have tried everything to get this under control. We've taken things away, given him time-outs, and even tried to leave him alone and not really push the issue. Nothing is working. What can we do?

Answer: Start by talking with your son's teacher. Use an assignment book for your son and ask the teacher to make sure homework assignments are written in it each day. (There may be a student who could be your son's "buddy" to ensure that this is done.) The teacher or the buddy can check to make sure your son has all the books and worksheets he needs for that night. Children need consistency, so try setting a homework plan and sticking with it consistently over a long period of time. You've found that giving your son a 30-minute break when he gets home doesn't work well, so don't do that anymore. Once your son gets home, give him 10 minutes to get settled, and then start on homework. Have one place in your house that he does homework every day; that might be the kitchen table, the living room floor, wherever he works best. Just as long as there is no TV on, it doesn't matter where homework gets done.

Give your son a time limit to finish his first assignment. On Mondays, he can have 20 minutes (or 30, or whatever works) to get his spelling words written. Set a kitchen timer, an alarm clock, or your microwave to go off at the end of that time. When he has worked for that amount of time and completed that assignment, he can have 10 minutes to have a cookie and milk or another snack, then he must get back to work. Keep doing this for each assignment.

All people respond better to rewards than punishment. As each assignment is completed, put a check mark or a sticker on a chart. When all work is completed for the night, your son can earn a walk around the block just with you or 15 minutes of computer time. When he has 20 (or whatever number works) stickers or check marks he can earn having a friend over to play on the weekend. You can ask the teacher to try a similar system to reinforce good classroom behavior.

Talk also with the school counselor. She may be able to give your son some individual time or include him in a small group on good behavior or work completion.

Headaches over Homework?

by Cindy Bond

"It's too hard!" has become your child's battle cry. You can't do your child's homework for him, so what can you do? Try these tips from the U.S. Department of Education.



- Contact the teacher as soon as you suspect your child has a homework problem (or any major schoolwork problem). Schools must keep parents informed, and you have a right to be upset if you don't find out until report-card time that your child is having difficulties. However, you may see a problem before the teacher does. By alerting the teacher, you can work together on a solution.
- Approach the teacher with a cooperative spirit. Believe that the teacher wants to help, even if you disagree about something. If you have a complaint, try not to put the teacher on the defensive. You might say, "I'm worried about why Rachel can't finish her math homework, and what **we** might do to help her." Don't go straight to the principal without giving the teacher a chance to work out the problem with you and your child.
- Let the teacher know if your child is bored with assignments or finds them too hard or too easy. Most teachers do want to assign homework that children enjoy and can complete successfully, and they welcome feedback from parents.
- Work out a way to solve or lessen the problem. Your strategy will depend on the problem and your child's needs.
- Is the homework often too hard? Your child may have fallen behind and will need extra help from a tutor, teacher, or parent to catch up.
- Does your child need extra support, beyond what home and school can give? Ask the teacher, guidance counselor, or principal if there are mentor programs in your community. Mentor programs pair a child with an adult volunteer to help with the youngster's special needs, such as tutoring or career advice.
- Follow-up to make sure that the approach you agreed to is working. Check back with the teacher in a month to talk about your child's progress.

10 Ways to Help Your Student Tackle His Homework

by Peggy Gisler, Ed.S. and Marge Eberts, Ed.S.

1. Use an assignment notebook so he/she knows what homework is required each day.
2. Introduce a planning calendar and show him/her how to use it when she begins to have long-term assignments.
3. Each day he/she should preview the assignments that he/she has to do and get the tough tasks out of the way first. He/She should write down the order in which the assignments will be completed.
4. Teach him/her to review him/her work frequently.
5. Get him/her an organizer, and show him/her how to use it so that he/she has a system for organizing all school papers.
6. Have him/her use a book bag to transport books and papers.
7. Encourage him/her to establish a regular time for doing homework.
8. He/She should keep old quizzes and tests to prepare for future tests.
9. Eliminate distractions such as phone calls and television during homework time.
10. Establish a regular place for doing homework.

Homework Checklist for Parents and Guardians by *Family Education Staff*

- ✓ Provide a quiet, well-lit space, away from distractions and with all the right study materials -- paper, pens and pencils, books, a dictionary, a desk, etc.
- ✓ Try to find a separate space for each of your children, or schedule quiet times for homework in designated spaces.
- ✓ Create a regular schedule, allowing for adequate study and free time.
- ✓ Limit TV time, and do not allow it during homework.
- ✓ When possible, be available to answer questions. Try doing a problem or two together, then watch as the child tries the next one.
- ✓ Avoid simply giving an answer. Instead, ask questions that let your child see the problem in smaller, sequential steps.
- ✓ Provide your kids with a notebook for writing down assignments. When they're finished, compare the homework and the notebook to make sure everything is done.
- ✓ See if the school has a homework hotline (that lists your child's assignments) and/or a homework helpline (assistance for your child).
- ✓ Review completed and graded assignments. Discuss errors to be sure your child understands the material.
- ✓ Share any concerns with your children's teachers about the amount or type of homework assigned. Be sure to let them know if your children are having difficulty or are unable to do most of it by themselves.

Homework Hassles!

An excerpt from Expert Advice from Rita Culross, Ph.D.

Question: My nine-year-old takes hours to do his homework. I've tried setting the timer, and using negative and positive results. The only thing that works is if I sit there the entire time and keep him on-task, which is hard because I have two other children with homework, and dinner to prepare. Do you have any suggestions?

Answer: Homework provides excellent practice in developing independent learning and task-management skills that will be important in later learning and work roles in the adult world. Homework can also extend after-school learning, allowing them to read and explore topics in depth. At the same time, too much homework or homework that is too difficult should be avoided.

As a first step, I would contact his teacher(s) and possibly the school counselor. Discuss the problem with them and develop a cooperative strategy for addressing the problem. You and his teacher can put into place a simple strategy of identifying his assignments, checking for completion the following day, and rewarding successful homework completion.

A good book to share with your son is *How To Do Homework Without Throwing Up* by Trevor Romain and Elizabeth Verdick. The book is aimed at students in grades three through six, and includes tips on setting up a homework schedule, how to get help with homework, etc. Another book is *The Berenstain Bears and the Homework Hassle*. You may want to read *How to Help Your Child With Homework* by Marguerite Radencich and Pamela Espeland. This book offers tips for halting homework battles with your child.

You are not alone. Homework battles are all-too-common between parents and children.

The Homework Supply Kit **by Sandra F. Rief, M.A.**

You can help your student considerably in cutting down on wasted time spent searching the house for necessary homework supplies and materials. Not only is it a frustrating waste of precious minutes, but it also causes a major break in productivity, pulling your student unnecessarily off-task.

This homework supply kit can be stored in anything portable, preferably a lightweight container with a lid. Some students work at their desks, or on kitchen or dining room tables; others prefer to spread out on their beds or the floor. With this system, where your student chooses to study doesn't matter. The necessary supplies can accompany her anywhere.

Recommended Supplies (Depending on Age of Your Student)

- _____ Plenty of paper
- _____ Sharpened pencils with erasers
- _____ Pencil sharpener
- _____ Ruler
- _____ Crayons
- _____ Paper hole reinforcers
- _____ Glue stick
- _____ Colored pencils
- _____ Colored pens and markers (thick and thin points)
- _____ Stapler with box of staples
- _____ Paper clips
- _____ Single-hole punch
- _____ Three-hole punch
- _____ Dictionary
- _____ Thesaurus
- _____ Electronic spell checker
- _____ Self-stick notepads
- _____ Highlighter pens
- _____ Index cards
- _____ Calculator

Excerpted from The ADD/ADHD Checklist by Sandra Rief, M.A.



Whose Homework Is It, Anyway?

Homework may be hard to handle for kids, and it certainly is for grownups. We all want our kids to do well, and it's often hard to take the long view, let the child figure it out, and avoid rescuing her. In other words, parents tend to help (or even do) their children's homework in a misguided effort to help them succeed in school. In their book, *7 Strategies for Developing Capable* Students: *Responsible, Respectful, and Resourceful*, H. Stephen Glenn and Michael L. Brock write, "Homework is the child's, not the parents' responsibility. By enforcing that early—with encouragement, empathy, and support—we lay the foundation for our children developing as capable young people who understand the meaning of personal responsibility." Kids need to learn their own work processes, they need to take responsibility for how they do in school, and sometimes it takes them awhile to figure it out.

As a parent, you have a couple of difficult questions to consider:

When, where, and how your child does his homework is negotiable. *Whether* he does it is not.

Can you let your kid fail in the short term to succeed in the long term?

What is your reaction when homework is being done, but not as you would have done it, or would like to see it done?

Here are some thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for reducing your child's stress about homework (and also lessening your own):

- ☆ Stay aware of your child's progress in school. That means visiting the school, asking for periodic conferences with the teacher (even when things seem right), and generally being involved with your child's education. Did you know that a parent's attendance at open house night is the number-one signifier of whether or not a child will succeed at school? The more involved you are with your child's schooling, the more clearly you'll know if he is having trouble with "homework: the concept" or "homework: this particular assignment."
- ☆ Stop taking responsibility for your child's homework. If you complete it, correct it, or take over, you may be learning, he will not be.
- ☆ Participate if he asks questions or asks for your suggestions. Gently guide him on the path to the answer (but do not provide it).
- ☆ Express your empathy and confidence in your child. ("Yep, this looks pretty challenging. I know you can figure it out, though.")
- ☆ Take a child's time temperament into consideration when you schedule time for homework. If your bright-eyed and bushy-tailed morning dove prefers to get up at dawn to complete his assignments, why not? He'll probably work better than in his brain-dead presleep period in the evening.
- ☆ For very active kids, it's torture to do homework after sitting in school all day. Plan an exercise break.
- ☆ Talk with your child about where to do homework. Some kids love to work in solitude, some prefer the hustle bustle of the kitchen table.
- ☆ Some kids actually work best with music blaring or in front of the TV. (This was true of my stepdaughter Rachel, who is now working toward her Ph.D. in chemistry!) Allow your child to try it, and monitor the results. Get him earphones so you won't have to try it, too.
- ☆ If your child is homework resistant, persevere. You can say, "When you're done, I'm looking forward to a board game with you" (or any other special time activity), so he knows you are interested in spending time with him—but that doing homework is nonnegotiable.
- ☆ A child should never be rewarded for good grades. Instead, encourage him to feel good about the process of learning. Celebrate the process and its completion, rather than the grade earned.
- ☆ Be open to the possibility that your child might need tutoring. You can talk with the school about what is appropriate, and where to find it.
- ☆ Don't try to be your child's teacher.
- ☆ Be available to offer guidance when he gets stuck. Share your approach, any tricks, resources you might know about.
- ☆ Don't reward procrastination.

The Right Way to Help with Homework

For science class, Olivia had a month to make something creative using recyclables. She spent her time watching TV while her dad built a life-size prototype of the NASA space shuttle for her using egg crates, bubble wrap, and Chinese take-out boxes.

If Olivia's in first, second, or third grade, don't do her dirty work night after night. Give her the homework support she needs without enrolling yourself in the primary grades again. When you find your place in the homework equation, she'll find hers.

This balance is critical when the tasks assigned have due dates far in the future. Despite her moaning and writhing to the contrary, long-term assignments aren't impossible missions, especially if Olivia is performing at or above grade level in the second half of third grade. They are perfectly matched to her developing skills. With the rudiments of reading, spelling, handwriting, and composition now behind them, most third graders are ready to work on a project that demands the use of all these skills.

Handling Big Assignments

Long-term assignments teach the ability to maintain a lengthy and ever-developing thought process and complete appropriate tasks within an assigned time. Even first graders get a feel for extended tasks with homework books that cover a week's worth of assignments. Kindergarten kids get their first taste by taking home the class teddy bear on Friday and telling the class, on Monday, how the bear spent his weekend.

How much homework help is too much? If you find yourself complaining too often and too loudly about the time and nature of Olivia's homework assignments, chances are you're doing more than your share. If her teacher can see your sticky hands all over her assignments, and most teachers can see this while standing on one foot with both eyes closed, know you've broken the balance. If Olivia becomes disinterested or cantankerous about her nightly work, or she can't sort her ideas from her dad's ideas from her mom's ideas, you've stepped way over the line. "If parents and kids and teachers think it is too much, it probably is," says Mona S. Wineburg, Director of Teacher Education at American University in Washington, DC. Parents, however, do have a pivotal role in homework for students in grades one through three.

The Adult Role in Homework

- *Act as point man.* Don't make it obvious, but hover nearby when Olivia does her homework. If she likes working at the kitchen table, for example, sit at the other end and write bills or work at your computer. This puts you in a prime position to watch how she paces herself, how she plans her work, and what kinds of problems make her restless and edgy. Note that if she can accurately explain her task and engage with her work comfortably for a short period of time, about ten minutes, she doesn't need help.
- *Be proactive.* To update her teacher about negative homework patterns you see forming and especially before the next long-term assignment, schedule a conference. "Teachers are less apt to be defensive when parents address problems as they're forming or before they happen," says Wineburg.
- *Come clean.* Parents get better homework grades from teachers when they admit they were the ones who made that refrigerator box elephant with the Clorox bottle legs. Admit it, and then be specific about which tasks you felt Olivia was incapable of doing. If, for example, you drew the state of Ohio on poster paper because hers was the size of a postage stamp, admit it, and then discuss ways to teach Olivia size and proportion. If you put the teacher in the teaching position, you've won an advocate for your child, and you.
- *Set a good example.* Obviously, you don't want to send the message to Olivia that it's okay to take credit for work performed by others (namely, you). Subtle patterns about honesty and accountability are being shaped here.

Homework-Balancing Strategies

The following strategies for long-term assignments will help you balance your role in the homework equation. For students in grades three and above, try the following:

- *Assign jobs.* Ask the teacher to divide project tasks into "parent actions and child actions"
- *Use examples.* When she hasn't a clue what to make out of recyclables, give her examples she can identify with. Give her visual and sensory examples to help her make her own creative links between what she knows and what could be.
- *Keep the target in sight.* What is the target we're trying to hit here? What are the steps to get to the target? When do we need to do them?
- *Know how long it should take.* When homework assignments are correctly gauged to Olivia's age and developing skills, they should take a corresponding amount of time to complete. If she's too slow or too fast for a third grader – taking forty minutes instead of twenty or completing an assignment in under ten minutes – talk to her teacher about adjusting her nightly assignments to better fit her abilities.
- *See how the teacher does it.* Though this online book is written for teachers, *Helping Your Students with Homework* by Nancy Paulu provides some excellent "behind the scenes" tips on how parents or tutors can help with homework without doing all the work. Log on at www.ed.gov/pubs/HelpingStudents/title.html.
- *Fit the space to the kid.* Often overlooked but crucial to effective work production is the space where Olivia completes her assignments for school. The better suited to her size, age, and needs the area is the more comfortable and productive she will be. Consider her furniture first of all. If she likes working at the kitchen table, use a footstool and booster seat to give her the ideal ninety-degree angle for her back and knees. Better yet, get a table and chair scaled for her size. Then consider her lighting. Ceiling light provides wide-space illumination for large projects, but smaller lights placed on either side of her worktable are essential for close work and allow her to focus without strain on her eyes. Arrange supplies in easy-to-find locations close to her work area.
- *Consider noise factors.* Though some kids can work effectively with the TV, vacuum cleaner, and a baby brother all blaring at once, most kids concentrate better on assignments when the noise volume is low. During homework periods, turn down, turn off, or remove the noisemakers to another room.
- *Set study hours.* Show Olivia that academic work is an important priority in your house by establishing a study hour each night. Forty-five to sixty minutes would be a comfortable period for a third grader. Set it to accommodate her energy and hunger levels and after-school activity schedule. In addition to her twenty-minute homework time, add time for reading books, listening to books on tape, or reading aloud to her. Practice keyboarding or Internet search skills. Play games with multiplication facts or practice cursive writing. Setting a study time each night, even for kindergarten students, ingrains good study habits at an early age.
- *Promote independence.* During study hour, don't do all her academic activities together. Breaking work time into small parcels optimizes concentration, and a variety of tasks helps sustain interest in schoolwork. Putting a clock, with hands, not digital, on the wall in her bedroom encourages self-management and reinforces time-telling skills.
- *Ask first.* Don't assume that Olivia needs, wants, or welcomes your help on every assignment. Even when you see her struggling, ask first if she wants assistance or if she's got this one under control. There's nothing more personally fulfilling, even to an eight-year-old, than successfully completing some "hard work" all by herself. Giving her the benefit of the doubt demonstrates your faith in her ability.
- *Assess her work.* Use some simple household activities to get a handle on how Olivia processes information, reads, writes, spells, and comprehends. Then share it with her teacher at your next conference. If you leave her a note reminding her to put her library book in her backpack tomorrow, can she read the note and successfully complete the task? To check comprehension ability, observe her telephone manners. Even seemingly simple chores are teeming with skills, so use them to learn volumes, every day, about how your child learns.

HELPFUL HOMEWORK STRATEGIES

Book Report Helper

Get several sheets of lined paper and staple them together to make a booklet. Each time your child finishes reading a chapter, have him write 1 or 2 sentences to describe what happened in that chapter. Guide your child to write the sentences IN HIS OWN WORDS. Be sure he describes the events in the proper order. Before starting a new chapter, have your child read what he has written about the previous chapter(s). This will help him to remember what is happening in the story. When your child finishes the last chapter, have him write a few sentences to describe how the book ended. Your child now has a summary of the chapter book he just read. He can use this summary to write his book report.

Car Homework Container

Place a plastic container in your car filled with school supplies. With our busy schedules, this is a time saver. Items to include (but not limited to) are: clipboard, pencils, blue and black pens, notebook paper, erasers, small dictionary, ruler, colored pencils, markers, and calculator. This container comes in very handy when you are pulled in so many directions.

Do it on your own!

My son used to come to me all the time and say he couldn't do his homework. We would always end up fighting and frustrated. I have a small bowl of sugar free candies, coupons for 15 minutes of video game time, bottles of bubbles, stickers, and so on. Every time he finishes a paper without saying he can't do it, or it is too hard to try, he gets to choose a coupon or a candy out of the bowl. It has worked for us for a couple weeks now. He does his homework and feels great about it!

Five Minute Fun Break

If your child is getting frustrated with an assignment, take a break to do something fun together. When a child just can't figure out how to approach the assignment (as in math), he can become incapable of hearing anyone explain it to him. That is the perfect time for a fun break. Take five minutes with your child to shoot baskets or dance to his favorite music. Shifting gears should break up the bad vibes so you can start fresh.

Homework Box

Keep all supplies in a homework box in a secure place (ours is on top of the refrigerator). Scissors, sharpened pencils, markers, rulers, pens, paper (all kinds), and maybe even a treat are in it, BUT cannot be used for anything but homework. That means if Dad needs a pair of scissors, or Mom needs a piece of paper, they have to find it elsewhere. Then, when homework time starts, everything is there and kids can't use missing supplies as an excuse to get off track. It only needs to be checked occasionally to renew supplies. My freshman in college still uses his homework box.

Make A Tune

1. Pick a tune that sticks in your mind and repeats, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."
2. Take your facts, words, or numbers that need to be memorized and place them within the song in the exact order they need to be memorized in.
3. Have your child sing the song over and over until he/she can remember.

You can also make silly stories to remember facts as well!

The Pinch-Hitter

Use this technique when homework becomes a battleground of tantrums and tears. If your child is upset over an assignment and you are becoming angry and frustrated, just sit out that inning! Have someone who is calmer--a spouse or an older child--step up to the plate. What to do if your relief pitcher isn't at home? Call him, or email! The homework helper is always the calmer person--even if it means you both take turns with your child until the homework is done.

Playing Games

Either purchase or make bingo games, board games or any other type of games that make learning fun. We have bingo for addition, subtraction, multiplication, rummy cards for the states and capitals...all of these things can help learn and reinforce the basics that our children have to learn. My son cannot just sit and study...we have to find creative ways to get it into his memory...once it is there, it usually will stay.

Scented Strategy

While studying for a test or essay, have the student wear a scented item (e.g. lotion or perfume). When the test or essay comes, have them put the same scented item on and it will help refresh their mind and help them remember what they were studying.

Share the Reading

A whole chapter or story can be too much for a LD reader. Have the child read the 1st paragraph, or sentence if a new reader, then you read the rest of the page.

Make the information or story as interesting as possible, pausing to reinforce the concepts presented. It gives you a better chance of finishing.

Soft Music

Select a mild, instrumental music tape and play it during homework time. This effectively blocks out distracting noises. Use of earphones is also helpful, so that the rest of the family can go on with other things.

Spelling Basketball

Purchase a small indoor Nerf basketball ring and about 5 indoor balls. Using your child's spelling list, play basketball. Each time the shooter misses - he or she must spell a word.

Test Me

Instead of asking my son questions, I have him ask me (i.e., math, spelling, etc.). This way, as I answer, he reads the the questions and answers and hears them aloud (from me). This takes the focus off him, yet he feels he has the authority since he can help and correct me. --Of course, I do not let on how this reverse learning works, I just let him think that he is the one who knows everything, and is helping someone who doesn't. After doing this strategy for multiplication lessons, his teacher informed me that he was the fastest and most accurate student in all three classes for knowing his multiplication problems during quizzes. It works! I wish every student (and parent) the best of luck! Happy learning!!!

Timers

The best way to get my child to be motivated and goal oriented is to use a timer. We set the timer for a mutually agreed upon time frame and this helps him to focus. He feels a sense of accomplishment upon achieving this goal. If he doesn't make the time goal, we just adjust it for the next task and discuss why this didn't work. He has participated in his success!