

## Homework Habits

Homework can become a ball and chain – entrapping evening hours otherwise spent in having fun or just hanging out. It is often fraught with pressure, frustration, obligation, guilt, and anxiety. After it's done, anything from worries and defeat to accomplishment and pride can bring one down or buoy one up. And I'm not talking about kids here – I'm talking about you parents.

Parents can get so caught up in their children's homework that it might as well be their own assignment. Some get involved because they believe it will never get done without their prodding and supervision, some think that a D in math means a D in parenting, some feel pressured by the school to oversee and correct homework, and some want to insure their child's achievement.

We must remember that if we take responsibility for our children's homework, they don't have to – they know Mom or Dad will make sure it gets done. They can virtually forget about it until the nagging starts to ratchet up.

Given an average of 2.5 hours spent on homework per school day for 11 years, children and parents spend 4,950 hours on it. Adding weekends, that's another 880 hours. (Don't tell your kids this!) Hopefully as the years progress, your involvement gets less and less, but that's a lot of hours to spend arguing, fighting, nagging, and pressuring. Here are some tips on how to make it more pleasant and

turn it over to your kids so they can take responsibility for it themselves.

1. Make homework time enjoyable for your child as soon as it starts. Establish small rituals; light candles, play music, offer tea. If you have dessert, offer it at homework time.
2. Never isolate a child to his room unless that is his choice. Most kids like to be in the center of family activity. Stay around.
3. Allow your child to determine the best time and place for homework. Let her set up a special place. Perhaps call it her office. You can play her secretary. Let her take the lead.
4. Do your work while your child does hers. Balance your checkbook, pay bills, do dishes. Don't leave your child to homework while you watch TV.
5. Question your assumptions about the conditions by which homework should be done. Perhaps your child can focus better with rap music playing or walking around a lot.
6. Find out what works best for your child, don't push what worked best for you. Some kids work better under pressure, procrastinating until the last minute and turning out a dynamite project. He may lose interest if it's started too early. Others need to work gradually over time.
7. Take interest in what your child has for homework but don't make it one of your top five questions as she comes in the door.
8. Be available for advise and help but don't give it unless asked.

9. Ask your child to tell you about what he has been reading or writing. Get into a discussion or debate about topics of homework. Talking about it helps the learning process.
10. If you know of a project your child is working on, cut out articles or clippings that you come across in magazines or newspapers that may relate. (Unless your child hates that!) But refrain from saying how she should use the information.
11. If your child's teacher insists on you signing homework, ask your child if he is ready for your signature and explain that you trust that it is finished and as correct as possible – that part is not your job.
12. Do not insist on correct answers, perfect spelling, neat handwriting. Unless you are home-schooling, you are not your child's teacher.
13. If your child complains about how "stupid" an assignment is, acknowledge how she feels and ask her what she thinks the point is from her teacher's perspective. Engage her in thinking about why it was assigned. Perhaps tell a story of your own. Do not dismiss or criticize her complaints.
14. If homework is not getting turned in, tell your child that you have learned this and would like to hear his side of the story. Do not accuse. Find out with empathy what the problem is for him rather than blaming him. Ask how you can help rather than declaring what you and he are going to do about it.

15. LET GO! Homework is your child's job. When you nag or get over-involved in how well it gets done, you are relieving your child of the responsibility for it by taking it on yourself.

Good work habits start early. Do everything you can to counter the "chore" of homework. And allow your child to be in charge of it—how, when, and where it's done as well as how well it's done. Your child is accountable to his teacher, not you for homework. The goal is for your child to handle it alone. Your job is to know your child, what he is capable of, what he needs help and support with, and how to give up controlling it so your child can own it and thus learn best. Remember it's the process and the learning that counts—not the grade.