

# Helping Your Student Get the Most Out of Homework

National PTA  
National Education Association

## Homework

Many students try to avoid it, but teaching and learning research indicates that children who spend more time on regularly assigned, meaningful homework, on average, do better in school, and that the academic benefits of homework increase as children move into the upper grades.

Parents and families play an important role in the process. Together, families and teachers can help children develop good study habits and attitudes to become lifelong learners.

This brochure answers questions many people have about homework. It gives specific advice for helping your children.

**Q**—Why do teachers give homework?

**A**—Teachers use homework...

- to help students understand and review the work that has been covered in class
- to see whether students understand the lesson
- to help students learn how to find and use more information on a subject

Homework is also the link between school and home that shows what children are studying.

Research shows that when homework is turned in to the teacher, graded, and discussed with students, it can improve students' grades and understanding of their schoolwork.

**Q**—How much time should my children spend each night on homework?

**A**—Most educators agree that...

- for children in grades K-2, homework is more effective when it does not exceed 10-20 minutes each school day;
- older children, in grades 3-6, can handle 30-60 minutes a day;
- in junior and senior high school, the amount of homework will vary by subject. Most older students will also have homework projects, such as research papers and oral reports, that may have deadlines weeks away. They may need help organizing assignments and planning work times to make sure homework is ready to turn in on time.

Your children's teachers can tell you how much time they expect students to spend on homework. Place most concern on whether the homework is meaningful and whether over a period homework is assigned in all of the student's subjects.

Ask your principal if your school or school district has a homework policy. If it does, make sure that you and your children know and understand that policy.

**Q**—How can I help with homework?

**A**—There are several ways in which you can help:

- Send your children to school each day, well-rested, fed, and with a positive outlook.
- Take an active interest in your children's schooling. Ask specific questions about what happens at school each day and how your children feel about it.
- Try not to let any of your own negative experiences keep you from supporting and encouraging your children's learning. Let them know how much you care about education by continuing your own learning both informally and formally, to impress its importance upon them.
- If possible, set up a quiet, comfortable study area with good lighting and the school supplies that your children need. This can be almost anywhere in your home; you don't need a special room.
- Set a family "quiet time" where you and your children can work together on homework, reading, letter writing and playing games.
- Allow your children to study in the way each of them learns best. For example, some children work best when they're lying on the floor with background music playing.

Make homework a daily activity and help your children develop good homework habits.

**Q**—Can my children do homework while listening to music or watching television?

**A** —Some students can work with a radio or stereo on, while others must work in silence. Television can be a big problem. Many teachers ask that the television be turned off while children are doing homework.

Research shows that American children on average spend far more time watching television than they do completing homework. Although it's worth noting that television can be a learning tool, it's best to leave the television off during homework time.

**Q**—How much help should I give?

**A**—This depends on each child's grade level and study habits. Younger students often need extra homework help. First, make sure the child understands the directions. Do a few problems together, then watch your child do a few. When your child is finished, check the work. Praise right answers, and show how to correct mistakes.

Avoid doing your children's homework for them. Teachers need to see where your children are having trouble.

One of the most helpful things you can do is to show your children that you think homework is important. Many children today do their homework while their parents are at work. When you are at home, ask to see your children's homework and discuss it with them. Ask questions and be supportive.

**Q**—What if I don't understand my child's assignment?

**A**—Today's students may have subjects that you never had or that you didn't like when you were in

school. You can still help your children by praising their progress, getting help from a public library or homework hotline, and talking with their teachers.

You don't have to be an expert in a subject to help with homework. There are many places to go for help.

**Q**—Do teachers really want me to ask them questions about homework?

**A**—Teachers want children to learn and want parents and families to be involved in their children's education. When you stay in touch with your children's teachers, they can ease your worries and offer their own homework tips and ideas on how you can help your children learn. Meet each of your children's teachers and ask what kind of homework will be given. This is very important, even if you have children in junior or senior high school.

Early in the school year and on occasion, ask teachers about your children's subjects and about homework policies. For example, ask what books your children will be using, what kinds of assignments will be given, and when the teacher is available to answer questions.

**Q**—One of my children tries hard but still has problems with homework. What can I do to help?

**A**—There could be a number of reasons for your child's trouble. Suggest that the child ask the teacher for extra help before or after school. Tell your child it's good to ask the teacher about homework or anything else he or she doesn't understand. Set a time to meet with the teacher to discuss the problem. You may need to meet again during the year to check on how your child is doing.

If your child understands the work but is still having trouble, ask for a meeting with the teacher. The two of you should work out a plan to meet your child's needs.

**Q**—My child seems bored by homework. Is this normal?

**A**—It's normal for students not to want to do their homework. But if your child always seems bored or unhappy, you need to try to find out the reason by talking with your child. Then talk with the teacher to come up with a solution.

Teachers want students to learn from homework. Tell the teacher if your child thinks the homework is too easy or too hard. This will help the teacher match homework with student ability and maturity levels.

**Q**—When I ask my children if they have homework, they say that it's finished or that they don't have any. How do I make sure they're really doing their work?

**A**—Make studying, not just homework, a daily habit. Students can always review lessons, read a book, or work on practice exercises during quiet time, even if they don't have homework. Ask younger children to show you their homework so that you can check it, sign it, and date it. Teachers like to see that adults have checked children's homework. If your children's school has a homework hotline, call it to check for the day's assignments. If your children often have no homework to do, you should let their teachers know.

Don't ask your children if they have homework each night—assume that they always have homework or studying to do.

**Q**—What if my child still isn't turning homework in?

**A**—State clearly and assertively to your child that you expect homework to be done and turned in to the teacher. Let your child know you will not tolerate irresponsible behavior about homework.

Don't wait until grades come out to find out if the problem has been solved. You may need weekly contact with the teacher until the student develops new habits.

**Q**—Should I reward my children for doing homework or for getting good grades?

**A**—Children like to know when they've done a good job. Your approval means a lot. Praise your children's work often. Show pride when your children do their best, no matter what grades they get.

Be careful about giving money or gifts as rewards. Most teachers want parents to reward students' work in other ways. The next time your child does a good job on a school project, plan a special family activity as a reward.

### Homework Hints

- Assume that your children will have studying to do every night.
- Ask your children if they understand their homework. If they do not, work a few examples together.
- Ask your children to show you their homework after the teacher returns it, to learn where they're having trouble and where they're doing well. See if your children did the work correctly.
- Stay in touch with your children's teachers. Ask about their classes and what they are studying. Ask their teachers how you can support what they are studying (flash cards, spelling, etc.).
- Remember, you and their teachers want the same thing—to help your children learn.
- Don't be afraid to get in touch with the teacher if you and your child don't understand an assignment or if your child is having a great deal of trouble. Almost all parents run into these problems, and teachers are glad to help.
- Don't do your children's work for them. Help them learn how to do it themselves.
- Show your children that you think homework is important. If you are at work during homework time, ask to see their work when you get home.
- Praise your children for doing well. Make praise a habit.
- Maintain a portfolio of "best pieces."
- Ask your school about tips or guides for helping your children develop good study habits.
- Help older students organize their assignments by recording them on calendars or planners, along with due dates, dates turned in, etc.

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