

A Family Guide to Homework

Homework is valuable practice for what your child is learning in school. To help it go smoothly in your home, here are tips that have worked for other parents. On the next page, you'll find a section with ideas to make study time more fun and productive, too.



Getting started

“Our son Jake was always ‘just a minute’ away from doing homework. We discovered that sticking to a regular time and place made a big difference. He knows that every evening after dinner, we clear off the table and he starts homework. His dad or I often sit with him and do our own ‘homework,’ such as paying bills, catching up on emails, or making a grocery list. As a result, it’s easier for Jake to get going—and sometimes he has to remind us that it’s time to work.”

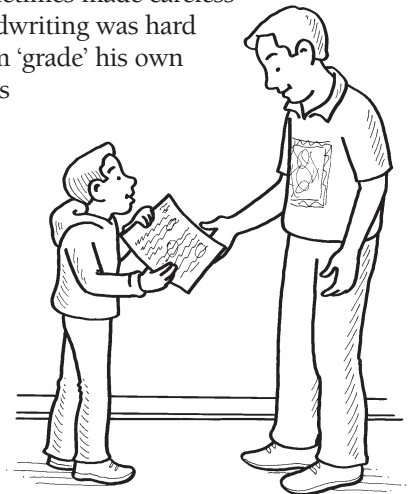
Staying focused

“A big family plus a small house equals a lot of distractions at homework time. Sophia, our third grader, would pay attention to what everyone else was doing instead of focusing on her work. So we put together a ‘study station.’ I got a trifold cardboard display (like those used at a science fair), and Sophia personalized it with her artwork. She loves standing it up to make an ‘office’ area, and it has helped her to block out distractions.”



Being thorough and careful

“I recently came up with an idea to encourage my son Seth to do his homework more carefully. Before, he’d rush through it, which meant he sometimes made careless mistakes. Plus, his handwriting was hard to read. Now I have him ‘grade’ his own homework. He pretends to be a teacher as he looks over each completed assignment. Then, he tells me what grade he thinks he would earn. This gives him a chance to make his work more legible and to correct his mistakes before he turns it in for a real grade. Since Seth started looking at homework through a teacher’s eyes, he has been handing in cleaner work.”



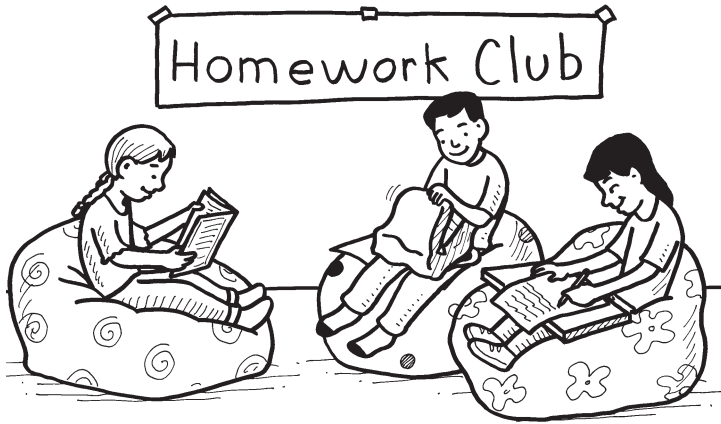
Remembering assignments

“When my daughter Emma left her homework assignment at school for the third time in a week, I knew we needed to do something. I took her to the dollar store and let her pick out a folder to use just for homework. At school, as soon as she gets an assignment, she tucks it inside the folder. We also attached a bright pink luggage tag to her backpack that says ‘Homework?’ This reminds her to put the folder in her backpack at the end of the day. These two changes are great reminders—now Emma is a lot less likely to forget her assignments.”

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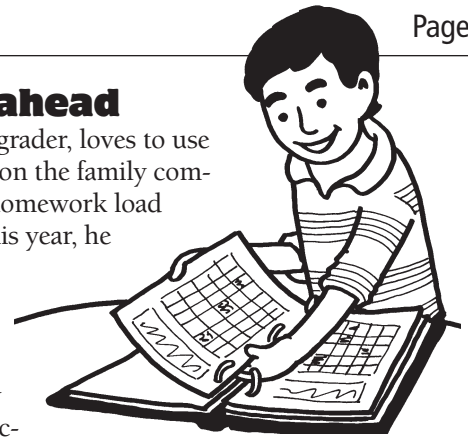
Boosting motivation

"I don't feel like doing homework.' My daughter Maria said that at least once a week. Then a classmate invited her to join her 'homework club.' The club is simply a group of friends who get together after school to do homework. They take turns hosting at their houses, or sometimes they meet at the library. Maria loves her group—and working with her friends has actually improved her grades."



Planning ahead

"José, my fifth grader, loves to use painting software on the family computer. When his homework load became heavier this year, he decided to use the program to make a personalized planner. He designed a weekly calendar with a section for each day. Afterward, he printed out one month's worth of pages and put them in a binder. Every day, he uses his planner to jot down assignments and keep track of upcoming tests and quizzes."



Doing your own work

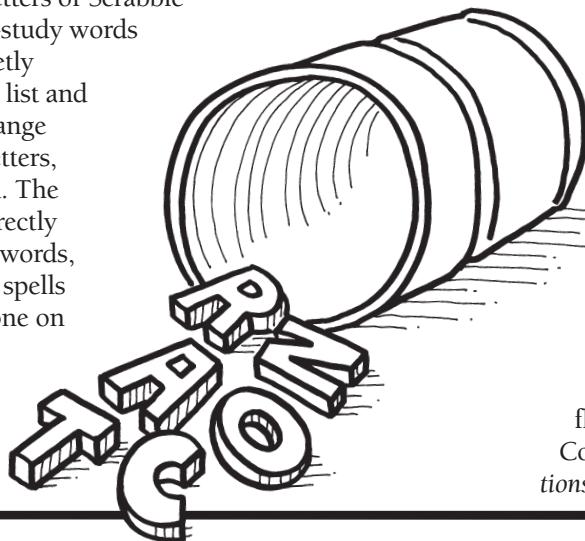
"I know my daughter Monica is supposed to do her homework independently so her teacher can see what she has learned. But when she'd ask me for answers, it was hard to watch her struggle. So I came up with a compromise. If she gets stuck, I have her tell me what she has already done to find the answer. Then, I offer something else she might try. For example, when she couldn't find the meaning of *photosynthesis* in a science chapter, I suggested that she use the glossary. I am still available to Monica, but she's responsible for doing the work. It's a win for both of us."

Study up!

The more different ways your youngster reviews what he's learning, the more likely he is to remember the information. Here are games that will add variety to his study time.

Spelling scramble

Let your child use magnetic letters or Scrabble tiles to practice spelling or word-study words with this game. Each player secretly chooses a word from his spelling list and drops its letters into a cup. Exchange cups. On "go," dump out your letters, and arrange them to spell a word. The first person to spell his word correctly earns 1 point. After using all the words, high score wins. *Note:* If a player spells a word correctly but it's not the one on the spelling list (say, *porter* instead of *report*), he still gets 1 point. Be sure to tell him the actual word, and have him spell it, too.



Vocabulary hangman

Try this vocabulary version of hangman. One player draws dashes to stand for each letter in the definition of a word. Other players take turns guessing letters to fill in the blanks. The player who reveals the definition and can name the vocabulary word wins the round.

Math war

Your youngster can work on math with this twist on War. Deal a deck of cards evenly to players, who stack their cards facedown (ace = 1, face cards = 10). On each round, players flip over two cards (say, 3 and king) and add their values ($3 + 10 = 13$). The player with the highest total takes the cards. If there's a tie, each player flips over two more cards and adds again. Collect all 52 cards to win the game. *Variations:* Multiply your cards instead of adding.

Discipline: What Works Best

Learning to behave well at home teaches your youngster to manage herself and get along with others—skills she needs in school. It also makes home life more peaceful for everyone. Try these suggestions for positive, loving discipline that will lead to better behavior.



Stay connected

Building strong bonds with your child can encourage cooperation. That's because she'll be less apt to act out to get your attention. Aim

to spend time each day focused solely on your youngster. Ask about her day or her hobbies, and tell her about yours. Share activities that you both enjoy, such as doing jigsaw puzzles, playing board games, or riding bikes.



Plan for success

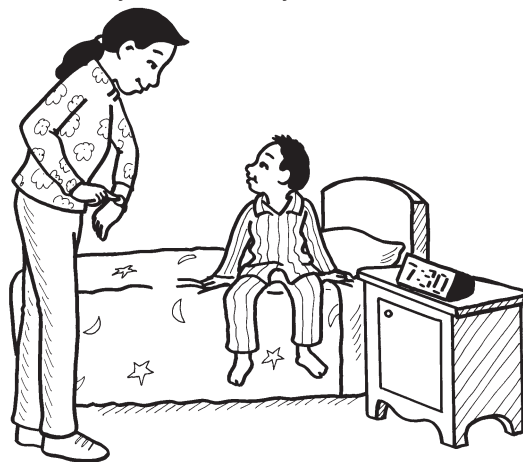
Create routines and an environment that inspire good behavior. Say your child is usually tired and hungry right after school. Consider letting him rest and eat a snack before he starts homework or chores. Or if he's always leaving his towel on the bathroom floor, shop together for a hook to hang it on. Have your youngster help you install it on the wall at his level.

Choose consequences wisely

Consequences that make sense to your child will inspire her to do the right thing in the future. For instance, if she tracks mud into the kitchen, a logical consequence would be that she has to mop it up. Next time, she may remember to remove her shoes when she comes into the house.

Stick to it

Your youngster will be more likely to follow the rules if he knows you mean what you say. Perhaps he's late for school because he wouldn't get up on time, and you say he has to go to bed early that evening. Resist the urge to change your mind, even if he insists that he *has* to stay up to finish his project. Otherwise, he may get in the habit of not listening because he doesn't believe you'll do what you said.



Express empathy

Acknowledging your child's feelings shows respect for her even when she makes a poor decision. Say she does a flip off the couch and scrapes her ankle. You could say, "I know you wish you had gymnastics practice today, and I'm sorry you got hurt. But you can't do flips off the furniture. Let's get you a bandage."

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Get your child's attention

When you correct your youngster, use a soft voice, and bend or kneel down so you're face to face. Then, explain what he did wrong and what he should do next. ("You left the front door open again, and the dog could have gotten out. Please post a reminder on the door so you don't forget to close it next time.") Then, have him repeat what you said in his own words, and let him show you that he understood. He'll be proud to share his sign with you, and he will know that you were serious.

Wait to respond

Feeling frustrated by your child's behavior? Try stepping away for a bit. You can say, "I'm angry that you went next door without asking. Go to your room, and we'll talk when I cool off," or "I need time to think about this. I'll let you know when I'm ready to talk." You'll set a good example for how to manage emotions, and you'll be able to discuss things calmly.

Decide what to overlook

If your youngster isn't hurting anyone or being disrespectful, consider overlooking behavior or decisions that you disagree with. Say you tell him that it's chilly outside and he needs to wear pants, but he shows up at breakfast in shorts. You might say, "I think you're going to be cold, but it's your decision." On the other hand, if he wants to wear flip-flops on PE day, you could explain that he must wear sneakers to stay safe.



"Secrets" from teachers

Good discipline strategies help teachers manage their classrooms so children get along and learn. And guess what? Some of their methods will work for you at home! Here are a few teacher favorites.

Teacher tip: "I let my students participate in creating the rules. First, I ask for suggestions that will make our classroom a peaceful place to learn and play. Next, I write our rules on poster board, and the children decorate it. Having some say motivates them to follow 'our' rules more cheerfully."

Parenting idea: Design a household rules poster together. Narrow it down to just a few so the rules will be easier for your youngster to remember. Also, keep rules positive ("Speak respectfully" vs. "Don't be rude"). Then, let your child illustrate each rule, and hang the poster where everyone can see it.



Teacher tip: "I like to make children my assistants. When I give them jobs to do, they feel special and important. Usually, they want to live up to that responsibility."

Parenting idea: Find opportunities to let your youngster help you. At the grocery store, for example, invite her to hold the shopping list and look for items you need. She'll concentrate on helping and be less likely to misbehave to get your attention.

Teacher tip: "I compliment good behavior whenever possible. Say there's a lot of commotion, and I need the class to settle down. I'll scan the room for someone who's sitting quietly. Later, I'll let that student know I noticed."

Parenting idea: Tell your child when she has done a nice job, especially if it wasn't easy for her. For instance, you could say, "I know there wasn't a lot for you to do while Aunt Linda and I chatted at her house, but you were patient and used good manners."

Home & School CONNECTION®

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Character Traits for School Success

Character traits like grit, perseverance, confidence, and courage can help your child do well in every school subject. Whether he's solving a tough math problem or giving a class presentation, the following tips will inspire your youngster to rise to challenges.

Use real-life examples

Seeing how others have overcome hurdles or been brave enough to face their fears shows your child that it can be done. And recognizing his own abilities encourages him to draw on them in the future.



- Let your youngster “interview” someone who has worked hard toward an achievement. Maybe a neighbor placed first in a 4-H contest he was afraid to enter or an aunt graduated from college after going back at an older age. Your child could ask questions like, “What was your biggest obstacle?” and “What kept you motivated?” He might share what he learned over dinner or even write a story about the person.

- Take your after-school conversations a step further by asking your youngster not only what he learned but also how he showed positive character traits. You could say, “Tell me about something you did that took courage.” Maybe he raised his hand during math although he wasn't 100% sure he knew the right answer. Or ask, “What did you persevere at?” Perhaps he finished writing a report on a topic that was difficult for him.

Improve a little at a time

How do you climb a mountain? One step at a time. Focusing on small improvements will help your child reach a whole new level—and teach her to be patient even when she doesn't see results right away.

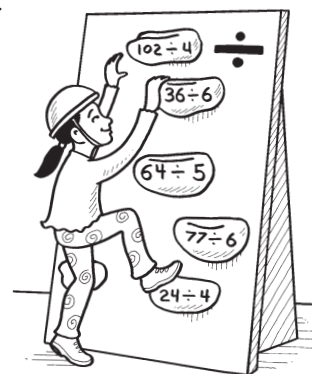


Mistakes are okay!

What do bubble wrap and a Slinky have in common? Both were failed inventions that later became popular products! Have your youngster research a favorite invention. She's likely to discover that trial and error led to its success. Knowing that mistakes are normal will give her the courage to tackle a project, for example, and the perseverance to keep going. *Tip:* Discuss your own mistakes and how you move on from them.

- Encourage your youngster to stretch just beyond what she can already do. She'll bump up her skills a notch without becoming so frustrated she'll want to give up. For instance, she might pick a library book that's slightly more advanced than she's used to reading—but not one that's five times harder.

- If your child is upset and says she can't do something, suggest that she add the word *yet*. (“I can't do division—*yet*,” or “I can't jump rope—*yet*.”) She'll begin to believe that she will master the skill one day soon.





Set meaningful goals

Working toward long-term goals will strengthen your youngster's "character muscles" in different ways. She'll need to be brave to aim for a target. She'll have to dig in with grit to stick with it until the end. And she'll develop confidence when she sees she's capable of reaching her goals.

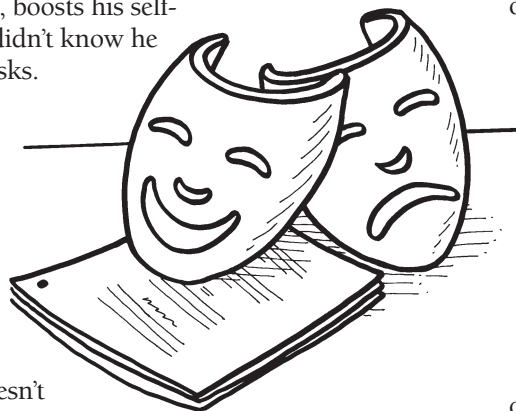
- What does your child want to achieve? Ask her to set two or three goals she could meet in a reasonable period of time. Have her put them in writing, along with a plan for meeting each one.
- She'll be more likely to finish what she starts if her goals are specific and she gives herself a deadline. *Examples:* "I will complete and turn in all homework on time for the rest of the school year." "I will learn to knit, and I'll finish a scarf by the first day of winter."

Take good risks

When your youngster ventures beyond his comfort zone in safe ways, he learns new skills, boosts his self-confidence, and taps into courage he didn't know he had. Here are three kinds of healthy risks.

1. Give your child opportunities to take *physical risks* by trying different outdoor activities. Encourage him to learn to ride a bike or dive into the pool. Or he might climb on bigger playground equipment or hike a steep trail with you.

2. Suggest that your youngster take *social risks* by inviting someone he doesn't know very well over to play or approaching a



new classmate at recess. Also, tell him it's okay to share his opinion, politely, when he works in a group, even if he doesn't agree with the others.

3. Let your child practice taking *emotional risks* through extracurricular activities. Say he auditions for a speaking part in the school play. Being chosen will build his confidence. If he's not picked, he might ask the play director about other ways to contribute, like making props or helping with stage lights. He'll learn that he can recover from disappointment.

Handle emotions

As your child works through difficult situations, he may experience feelings like fear, embarrassment, and aggravation. Knowing how to cope will help him get beyond them and keep going.

- The way your youngster looks at something can make the difference between his wanting to quit or to continue. Say he's disappointed because he missed throwing a runner out at home plate during his baseball game. Remind him of the last time he made a good play—and have him visualize himself doing it again next game. That will make him feel more in control and boost his confidence.
- Show your child how to use humor to put things in perspective and relieve stress. Maybe he's frustrated because he misplaced a permission slip and he has looked everywhere. You might say, "I bet it's hiding with the lost socks!" Then, help him think of ways to solve the problem. Perhaps he could ask the bus driver if he left it on the bus, or a friend will let him make a copy.

