

MANAGING HOMEWORK: TIPS FOR PARENTS

by Claudia Perez

Homework—as long as there has been formal schooling there has been homework. Reactions to homework vary from a welcome challenge to stress overload for all involved: students, parents, and teachers. But like it or not, homework is here to stay. For those of you who associate the start of school with the potential for homework meltdowns, we offer some answers and helpful tips, suggestions, guidelines, and interventions on how to make the homework struggle a more stress-free and productive experience.

Why homework? For starters, teachers have long used homework to provide additional learning time, strengthen study and organizational skills, and keep parents informed of their children’s progress. Research also indicates that homework is an excellent means of reinforcing and consolidating the information and skills your child learns at school. Second, homework has many potential benefits; it helps develop study skills, time management skills, independence and, most importantly, responsibility.

How much homework is reasonable? Summarizing what many experts have said and research has shown (NEA; National Parent Teacher Association; U.S. Department of Education), children in kindergarten through second grade benefit from 10-20 minutes of homework per day. In grades 3-6, students may benefit from 30-60 minutes a day. In middle and high school, students may be reasonably expected to complete one to two hours of homework per night, varying by subject and from night to night. Some parents may think, “Well, my child is doing way more (or way less) homework than this.” Either way, homework loads are flawed by the law of averages. Some students do very little homework, as they may get the majority of their work done at school, while others spend more time on assignments or experience difficulties that require additional time. When students with disabilities participate in the general education curriculum, they are expected to complete homework along with their peers. But, just as students with disabilities may need instructional accommodations in the classroom, they may also need homework accommodations. The bottom line is: amount of time spent in homework should be “reasonable” and it should fulfill the intent of helping consolidate important academic skills.

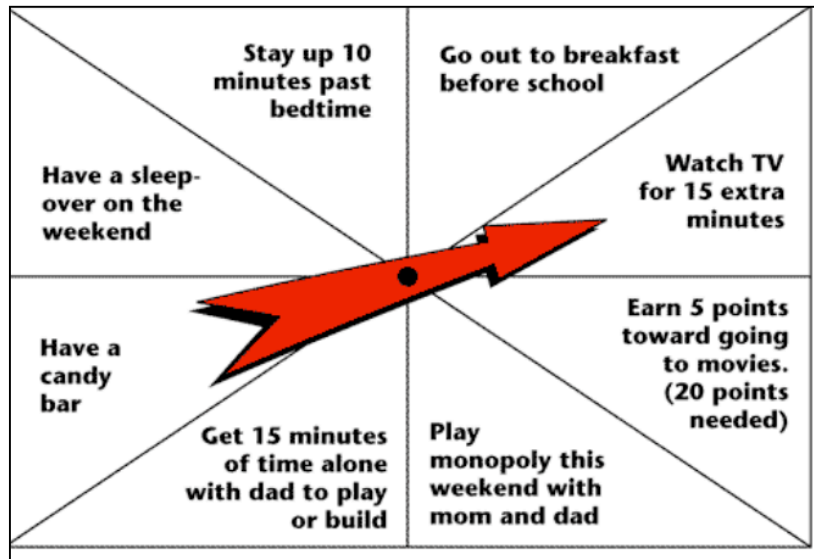
What can I do to help? There are many ways that students drift into academic trouble: problems with homework are a common component of declining performance. Homework problems can quickly snowball into serious academic difficulties that lead to undesirable consequences. It is important that a family find a plan that works for them and stick with it. Whatever the plan and however you decide to implement it, the homework plan begins with you. Studies show that parent participation and involvement are key to helping their children overcome difficulties with homework, and facilitating academic success in the classroom. In the following sections, both general and specific strategies are discussed for assisting with homework assignments.

General Strategies for Assisting with Homework

- ✓ SPACE: Provide a quiet, well-lit place to complete homework. Make sure all materials are available and avoid having the radio or television on to minimize distractions. Keep interruptions by siblings and friends to a minimum as well.
- ✓ SCHEDULE: Make studying, not homework alone, a daily habit. Don't ask your child if he/she has homework each night – assume that he/she always has homework or studying to do. Establish a set time for homework and/or studying. It is not a good idea to do homework before bedtime or to leave long or involved projects for the last minute.
- ✓ MODEL: Model organizational techniques, work habits, and consider doing “adult homework” while your child completes his/her homework.
- ✓ ATTITUDE: Show your child you think homework is important. The attitude you express about school and homework will be the attitude your child acquires. Set clear expectations.
- ✓ SUPPORT: Check homework and be available for assistance. When your child asks for help, provide guidance, NOT answers.
- ✓ INVOLVEMENT: Take an active interest in your child's schooling. Be in contact with your child's teacher and do not wait until grades come out to discover there is a problem. Take your child's difficulties seriously; help devise a plan to assist him/her with difficulties at school.
- ✓ PRAISE: Praise your child for good effort, as well as good performance, which helps build self-esteem; maintain a portfolio of “best pieces” of work from school.

Specific Strategies for Assisting with Homework

- ✓ Use checklists and/or assignment books to help with organization of homework assignments. Set up file folders for each subject area to track papers or long-term assignments. Use a plastic bin or pencil box to store study materials. It is portable and accessible.
- ✓ Designate a study space and time. Use visuals such as clocks. It may be beneficial to use timers to signal when to start, when to stop, how much time is left, and when to take breaks. Use a calendar to break big projects into manageable chunks.
- ✓ Homework Contracts are useful and rewards, motivators, and /or incentives can be incorporated according to the likes of your child.
- ✓ Make a game out of homework completion – “place bets” or try to “beat the clock” based on how long it usually takes to finish assignments. A sample reinforcement system follows for completing work on time or ahead of schedule.



- ✓ You can develop a customized game spinner by using cardboard and brads, or you may purchase blank spinners from educational supply stores. Fill in each section of the spinner with a reward. Use tape so that you can occasionally change the rewards. Be sure to vary the prizes on the spinner so that some are more desirable. You may also want to have a space marked "no-win."
- ✓ Establish criteria with your child for completing homework assignments appropriately or finishing all homework tasks for the evening. When your child meets the criteria (i.e. completes the task), allow him/her to use the spinner and earn the reward indicated. Be sure to use an appropriate positive statement such as, "Great job tonight!" To phase out dependence on the spinner, gradually change the rewards to verbal praise and encouragement for homework completion.

Homework Resources for Parents

- ✓ **Homework Hotline** provides homework assistance to Broward County students in grades 1-12 by way of a telephone communication network. Teachers staff the telephones on Mondays through Thursdays from 4:00-8:00 pm. The phone number is (954) 581-5377.
- ✓ <http://interventioncentral.org> provides free tools and resources for staff and parents to foster effective learning for all children. Sample homework contracts are available at this site.
- ✓ <http://www.askanexpert.com> provides "real world" experts who may answer your questions about important homework topics.

- ✓ The US Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/index>) offers many publications, brochures, and useful information on homework and other educationally relevant material for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. You may download “Homework Tips for Parents” a brochure offered by the U.S. Department of Education at:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/homework/homeworktips.pdf>

(English Version)

<http://www.ed.gov/espanol/parents/academic/involve/tareaescolar/tareaescolar.pdf>

(Spanish Version)