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."

continued

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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.

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