



When Homework is a Battleground: 12 Tips for Parents

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Unless your child is like Jason, the precocious brain in the comic strip, *Fox Trot*, who begs his teacher for more homework, you probably have to nag to get the latest reading or math assignment done. At worst, homework can become a constant source of stress for parents and kids.

Even if your house is a homework battleground, take heart. There are strategies parents can use to encourage a more positive approach toward completing school assignments. Kids find homework difficult for many reasons. The key is to understand and help them overcome those barriers. By doing so, you'll help to set the stage for independent learning and better school performance.

Here are 12 tips that can help make homework easier on everyone and more productive for your child:

1. Make sure your child isn't chronically overtired.

Many kids today are so overscheduled with sports, karate, dance lessons and the like that they lack the energy to do it all. Give your child's schedule an honest look and cut back if necessary.

2. Look at what they're eating.

Kids who don't eat nutritious foods, and instead fill up with sugary foods at lunch and candy or soda in between, may experience abnormal energy highs and lows. This can leave them either too fidgety or too sleepy to concentrate on homework.

3. Use foods to create the right mood.

Introduce foods to help your child feel more alert, calm or better able to concentrate. If your child is sleepy – cold, spicy, minty or sour foods can perk them up. Try cinnamon or mint sugar-free gum or hard candy. On the other hand, children who have a hard time sitting still may benefit from warm, smooth or sweet foods and beverages. Try a banana or some warm cider. And if concentration is a problem, something chewy, such as raisins, may help them focus.

4. Establish a routine.

Schedule homework for the same time each day. After the child comes home from school and has time for play, it's always homework time, no questions asked. If homework is done before dinner, remember that it's important to give them time to run around and burn off some energy before they sit down to work. And don't let them watch TV before homework. A number of studies have shown that kids get over stimulated and have a hard time making the transition from TV to homework.

5. Find the right environment.

Work with your child to find the right place for homework. Older children may prefer the quiet of their room while younger kids often want to be with Mom or Dad. Work with their preferences and find a spot that isn't distracting and:

- Provide a stable base of support for writing. If a table or desk is used, the child's feet should touch the floor (use a stool if necessary) and the table surface should allow elbows to rest at a 45-degree angle from the body. Some children find it helpful to kneel or sit on the floor at a low coffee table, others may do better with an easel that places paper at an angle for ease of writing;
- For reading assignments, children may want to sit in a comfortable chair with a bed reading pillow or lie on their stomach on the floor over a pillow.

6. Take frequent breaks

Encourage kids to get up and run around every 20 minutes or so. Activities such as jumping, spinning, bike riding, running around, even doing household chores, can help burn off excess energy and get them refocused on sitting and completing their homework.

7. Try fidget toys for better concentration

Since movement helps us concentrate better, some kids benefit from something to fidget with while studying. Try a Koosh ball, flexible straw, rubber band, stress ball, silly putty, or pop beads.

8. Get creative in another dimension

Stimulate learning by encouraging your kids to try studying vocabulary words using a moveable alphabet on the refrigerator, or writing words on different surfaces like a magna-doodle, white board or chalk board. Younger kids may have fun tracing words in flour, sugar or even finger paint.

9. Use your senses

Try having your child memorize facts by closing their eyes after they've read the fact and reciting it back with eyes closed. This helps to internalize the information. Flash cards can help with the memorization process.

10. Show a positive attitude

Your child's attitude towards homework will reflect your own. Show your child how the skills they are learning relate to the things you do as an adult such as writing letters, reading and understanding instructions, balancing your checkbook, etc. Provide rewards and positive feedback for working hard and improving. At the same time, keep open lines of communication with school and let them know if homework is taking too long or if your child is struggling with something.

11. Provide guidance, not answers

Encourage your child to think for himself. Too much help teaches your child that when the going gets tough, someone will do the work for them. Ask the teacher for tips on providing just the right amount of guidance.

12. Read, read, read

Have your child read aloud to you every night in a quiet place. Help make the most of this time by pointing out missed words and helping your child read the word correctly. Check your child's understanding by occasionally pausing and asking questions about the events in the story. Ask your child to explain in their own words what happened in the story; what they think will happen next and why.

Give these strategies a try until you find the right combination for your child. You'll be amazed at how a few basic changes can not only make doing homework less stressful for the entire family, but will help your child be a more successful learner.