

Help with Homework

Although educators have begun to reevaluate the value of homework for elementary age children, teachers continue to assign homework to their students. This can be very challenging for children with attention deficit or hyperactivity or frankly many young children because it's so hard to focus and get work done at the end of the school day. There could be competing motivations, that children are tired, the parents are busy and they're ending a long day. It's really hard to get homework done in a smooth and comfortable way and so many parents are stressed by the challenges of getting their children to complete their homework. I have some suggestions for you.

One of the most important suggestions is that you talk with the classroom teacher about his or her expectations. If you want to know when homework is being assigned, do they have a schedule for assigning homework, you want to know how much time they expect the homework to take it's good to know what the role parents should play, how much parent involvement should there be in any given homework assignment. We want to know how homework is returned so you can build some habits for children to remember to turn the homework in when it's done. You want to get the teachers philosophy about the role homework plays in his or her program. Is it to review work that is done in school, is it to prep the child for something that's happening the next day, is it so you can see what your son or daughter can do, is it simply a matter of practice. You want to get an idea of what the purpose of homework is.

Perhaps more than any other thing, routine matters. Building a homework routine can accomplish so much. If you come home have your snack maybe have some physical activity and get in the habit of getting to your assignments in the same way every day, it goes much better. Yes, I know there are days that you have soccer practice and maybe on soccer practice day is different than other days but it's so important to have a routine. I will tell you that many families have routines that don't seem to work. The kids come home, watch tv before they do their work and then it's harder to disengage from screen time to do their assignment. I know children that save their homework until after dinner when if they're taking medication and it may have worn off, or after dinner they're not at their best and not able to focus as well. I think most children do better if they do their homework before dinner.

It's really important to establish the correct homework environment. Some children do better doing the work in their rooms, in my experience most do not. The bedroom is also sometimes a playroom more distractions and mentally it's harder to keep your focus on a task when there are competing motivations that exist in the room. The other thing that's wrong about doing homework in your bedrooms is that parents don't get a chance to supervise, monitor, or work in parallel. I find that most children do better doing homework in the den or the living room or in the kitchen as long as there's not so much distraction that it gets in the way of their focus. Before you begin doing homework, talk about why we want to do homework, Most kids, if you ask them if they want to do homework they'll tell you no, but what they're really telling you is that homework isn't any fun. That begs the question of why isn't homework fun but that's another element of discussion for another time. What I want to do is explain to the kids that, wait a minute, doing your homework shows me what you learned, doing your homework prepares you for the next day, doing your homework helps you be better educated, doing your homework shows that you're willing to work, doing homework gets privileges, doing your homework makes you smarter, gets you better grades.

There are a number of reasons why even though homework may not be fun, we want to do our homework. In some families I have a list of reasons why we should want to do our homework and we review the list and identify which reasons fits which assignments.

After we've talked a little bit about motivation, it's important to address barriers. Are you hungry, are you distracted by something, is there a competing motivation, does this work seem too hard for you, are you lacking skills, does it seem too much. Because if you don't address the barriers they will interfere with motivation and task completion.

When you've set up to the homework the next thing you have to do decide is what homework are you going to do first. Hopefully homework in elementary school is relatively brief, no more than thirty or forty-five minutes, and even then you can break homework activities into segments. Some kids like to do the homework that is easiest first. It builds and flow and gets them started. Other families prefer tackling the more difficult work. Some families will do part of an assignment, stop, move onto another assignment that may require more or less attention. I have families that select which assignments based on which assignments will need more parental support or involvement. Task selection is really helpful in getting assignments done.

After you've picked your assignment you have to set your goals. Goal selection is perhaps one of the most important things in getting work done. The goal shouldn't be to finish the assignment. The goals should be to take a bite of the assignment that you can chew and swallow. How much work can you complete without distraction or drift because if the process involves you starting an assignment, you're drifting, mom and dad saying get back to work, you get back to work, you work for a few more minutes, mom and dad say you need to focus, which we all know we shouldn't be saying to our children. We have a process of getting the homework done but it's not the right one for building task completion skills. We want the children to learn how to set goals for the assignment, and breaking the assignment in pieces so that they can feel better about their ability to do the work independently. As children are meeting these goals, they should track their goal completion and announce their accomplishments. They should be able to say to you dad I got the first five pages, read mom I did five of these questions or did two lines of math. I met my goal. Then when you go to reward their homework participation you can reward them for meeting goals not simply for doing the assignments.

As you all know homework organization becomes more and more important. When an assignment is completed you are not done. The next step is where you put the assignment, have you reviewed the assignment, are you going to share that completion with your parents or are they going to see the work that you've done, and when is it going to be turned in. Often kids will do homework but they don't turn it in. In that case we have to practice through imagery and role play the process in which the assignments are being turned in the next day. This goes back to talking with teachers about their philosophy and expectations. Teachers should have a routine at school for making sure that children turn in their assignments.

Homeschool communication is very important. I know many families whose children are getting the homework done but the teachers don't really appreciate the process in which the assignments were finished. They don't know that it's taking an hour and a half when it should take twenty minutes. They don't understand how much work parents are doing getting their kids to understand

the assignments. They don't appreciate the arguments that went into getting the homework done. I think it's really important to share with the teachers your child's attitudes, their efforts, where their skills were lagging. It's important to communicate more about the homework process than just turning in the assignments. I know the teachers can help you address some of these homework challenges if they are more informed.

The last thing I want to mention and we forget this part particularly when we're talking about children with attention and self-control problems is that these are skills that develop over time. It's not like you have a third grader that has to be a pro at getting homework done. These are attitudes, and efforts and skills that you are teaching them. That's the value of homework. It's not what they learn about division or the solar system it's what they learn about learning and getting the work done. If you approach it that way or from that point of view homework can be much more rewarding.

I want to loop around to one thing that I forgot and that is the idea of calling this homework in the first place. I don't understand that phrase. These are leaning activities these are not work. To assign reading as homework doesn't make sense to me. I'll use a phrase I'm not supposed to use but when I was a boy we got to read. It wasn't that we had to read. I can't imagine a teacher assigning reading as homework and in fact even if your child doesn't have homework what they can do is participate in some learning activity to keep the daily routine going. To just think about this as work undermines some of the motivation for getting schoolwork done.