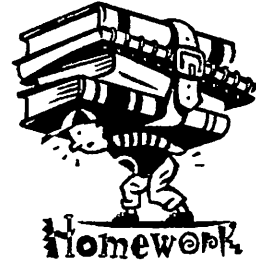


# TAKING THE HEADACHE OUT OF HOMEWORK

Stacy Silver - PS199



Different families have different issues regarding homework. There are those for whom it doesn't take too long, while some struggle until late at night. Some students do well with little stress; some melt down at the mere mention of assignments. Moreover, how long it takes a child to do homework may vary even on a single night and on a given assignment.

Setting up the environment that will allow your child to do his/her best thinking will allow him/her to focus on learning, and to develop a positive attitude and productive work habits.



## TIME

1. Set aside a consistent and specific time every day for homework.

For example,

- After a few minutes to unwind but BEFORE play /TV time.
- From 6:00 to 7:00, then finish up after dinner/TV.
- Always after dinner while you do the dishes, always at afterschool.

Make sure it's an appropriate time of day.

- Some children need to unwind afterschool though play or sports before sitting back down to work.

2. Be sure there's enough of time allotted so the work can be done.

- Assume 1 hour (in a block for older children, broken up for younger) and talk to the teacher to get a general sense of how long s/he expects the work to take.
- On busy days (soccer practice, etc.) work in creative solutions.
- The long commute may be just perfect reading time.
- Plan to let your child begin assignments early (during recess) those days.

3. Don't consider homework time "flexible time."

- This time is for homework ONLY, it's not time other stuff can cut into (we want to develop a habit of responsibility and respect for work).

4. Set a routine.

- Ex.: Finish homework, parent-check, sign notes, pack backpack, brush teeth.



## SPACE

1. Designate a homework workspace for every day. Good spaces might include the child's desk, dinner table, anywhere that is...

- Comfortable and supportive.
- Well lit and with a hard writing surface.
- Away from the TV and younger siblings.

2. Try to eliminate distractions.
  - o Younger siblings can be having their special reading /quiet time then, too.
  - o Your child can read aloud to you while you wash dishes.



## ORGANIZATION

1. Be sure all necessary supplies are on hand.
  - Have plenty of pencils, loose leaf, books, dictionary, glasses, even a cup of water -- anything to allow work to go smoothly.
  - This also helps the space feel like "work space."
  - Help your child have an organized folder/notebook by:
    - Looking at it regularly to keep them accountable for neatness.
    - Reminding them to use those nice folders you bought in September.
    - Cleaning out worksheets more than a month old.
  - Reward your child with ample praise for not using their work as insulation at the bottom of their book bags.
2. Color code notebooks and folders by subject.
3. Check work against the assignment book daily.
  - Your child should *check off* each assignment as it is completed.
4. Make sure all work gets back to school at the appropriate time.
  - Help your child recognize what books, etc. need to be carried back and forth every day, and which do not. This will also cut down unnecessary shlepping and confusion.
  - Assignments are complete only after they've been checked *and put in the correct folder in the book bag*.
  - Keep a "pack-up" checklist posted for daily reference.



## PLANNING

1. Have a calendar nearby and fill in due dates for projects, special days, etc. Refer to it often.
  - \* "Oh look, that project is due in eight more days."
  - \* "We'll be away that week; you'll read that book at Grandma's."
2. Practice formally / informally estimating time
  - \* "How long do you think it will take us to...?"
  - \* "How long did it take to...?"
  - \* "Can you write a thoughtful page in 15 minutes? 20? 45?"
  - \* "Which will take longer today, math or spelling?"

3. Help your children plan the order in which they'll do their assignments.

This may vary based on:

- \* The amount of time available.
- \* Their energy level.
- \* Each assignment's urgency, etc.

4. Help / let them set criteria for what they will do.

- \* Start with more challenging tasks, while they're still alert.
- \* Remind them that schoolwork is more important (and therefore a higher priority) than Nintendo, which also requires less energy.

5. Keep track of work well done.

- \* Try putting a sticker on the calendar for each night that homework is completed.
- \* Set up a simple reward system. Perhaps 10 stickers are worth one reward. (Ice cream? Time for just the two of you? Late movie night?)
- \* Hang up great work (not just good grades) on the refrigerator.



## WHEN THEY SAY THEY NEED HELP (Or you think they do)

1. Break "big homework nights" into manageable chunks.

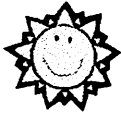
- ✓ Number assignments in the order they will be done.
- ✓ Plan a break after [math] and before [spelling].
- ✓ Check in after homework time. Will you try the same order next time?

2. Be supportive without taking on the responsibility for the assignments.

- ✓ Let them explain the assignments to you.
- ✓ Guide them through the directions if they're nervous, then try the first example together.
- ✓ Tell them it's ok to *try*, even if they're confused (They should try to trust themselves).
- ✓ Encourage them to call a classmate - have that class list handy and don't make homework time too late to call a friend.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to leave them alone to work.
- ✓ Some homework (especially in the younger grades) requires direct adult involvement but in any case *don't do it, don't rewrite it, and don't give away the answers*. Don't do your child's homework for them so it will look good. This practice is futile and ultimately, terribly counter-productive.
- ✓ It is fine to sign, discuss or review homework, or to practice samples. Know that your child's finished product doesn't have to be perfect; it does have to show reasonable effort.

3. If your child needs more support...

- ✓ Plan to check back in with them to see how it's going after they've worked for [20] minutes -- then do.
- ✓ Try not to let your attention become the main goal of the activity.
- ✓ Send a note in to the teacher if homework continues to be a problem.
- ✓ Be optimistic and impressed by their good work.
- ✓ Be amazed at their interesting writing ideas and word choices.
- ✓ Ask 'them to "teach you" that neat math stuff they're so good at.
- ✓ Ask them to read to you or tell you about their reading.



## MAINTAINING GENERAL GOODWILL

1. Show an interest in your child's homework.

- \* Ask about the subjects and the work to be done.
- \* Try to be supportive and positive, rather than critical.
- \* Speak slowly and clearly.
- \* Compliment your child for any parts of the assignment s/he understands or completes correctly.

2. Be realistic.

- \* Your child will not be successful with every assignment, some frustration is normal.
- \* Let your child know you don't expect them to be "perfect," only to do the best they can each day.
- \* If your child has a "bad day" getting homework done, try not to overstress it. Then, on the next days she does well, point out how great it is that she got back on track.
- \* If homework just can't be completed one night, send your child to bed early and give a note to his teacher in the morning to let them know that you cut homework time short and will make sure the missing work is made up the next night.
- \* Check in with the teacher if it becomes a chronic problem.

3. Be a role model.

- \* Take the opportunity to read a book or newspaper while your child studies.
- \* Reading together helps create a learning atmosphere.
- \* Let your child see/know about ways you rely on the information s/he is learning. (Fractions and measurements are used in cooking, etc.)
- \* For social studies, tell about your family's journey through the generations, or about the time you went to other lands. Look over photo albums together.
- \* Discuss favorite books with your child (yours *and* theirs).
- \* Talk about what you're learning (in school, at work, from the newspaper, from others, from your child, etc.)
- \* Let them know they're smart, just like you!

