

## Homework Hints

Homework serves several purposes in your child's education. Repeating tasks learned in school reinforces skills. Homework assignments may broaden the scope of material presented in school. Independent reading and researching are valuable tools reinforced by homework assignments. These homework hints are based on recommendations from Barbara Howard, MD, a behavior and learning specialist from Johns Hopkins, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

**Homework struggles** can be quite stressful for children and parents alike. Parents should recognize that homework excuses are often a child's attempt to "save face". "The teacher didn't explain it" or "she didn't give us the worksheet" may be easier for your child than "I forgot" or "I didn't". However, excuses may also be a way to cover-up an inability to do the work due to learning disability. A child who is incapable of doing reasonable and developmentally appropriate homework should have testing for learning problems, and may need extra support to succeed.

If there is no reason to think your child has trouble with learning, then help with **organization** may be necessary. Difficulties of this kind may be part of ADHD, but start with helping your child gradually assume homework responsibility with support from you.

- Provide different colored folders for each subject
- Provide a different folder for homework coming home and homework going back to school.
- Be sure to teach your child to write down assignments every day, preferably in an assignment book. Make a chart in the book with each subject each day, and check off completed tasks. Ask the teacher to help your child learn this skill.
- Help your child get started by reading directions together; stand by as your child does the first item, but then step away
- Set up an incentive system to reward improvement in organizational tasks, even if the homework answers are not correct.
- Get in the habit of putting the loaded backpack by the door at night to smooth the morning routine.
- Have a homework "buddy", a classmate who can help clarify assignments by phone
- Break homework down into smaller tasks rather than doing it all at once.
- Make a calendar for long-term assignments, mapping how work will be done over time

### Set rules for homework help.

- Homework sessions should not disintegrate into fights or screaming.
- If the child wants help, he or she can certainly ask, but must treat parents properly or help is not given any more **that day**.
- This demonstrates a life lesson: don't be abusive when frustrated, especially when someone is trying to help you
- It is not the parents' responsibility to be sure homework is free of errors.
  
- If your child does not want help but you feel he or she needs it:

- Establish a policy that you will not offer help for the first hour unless asked
  - After the first hour, offer help, but the child can refuse
  - Revisit this policy every few weeks as grades come in
  - When the child has control or autonomy like this, it is easier for him or her to accept help
  - Consider an outside tutor if the dynamic between you and your child is not working well.
- Parents usually feel that children should not do homework in front of the TV or while listening to music. In fact, most homework experts recommend a quiet brightly lit area free of **distractions**, with all necessary supplies at hand. However, if your child is succeeding with homework in a noisy environment, don't interfere. If you feel your child could do better with homework in a quiet environment, suggest a month-long trial of quiet and then determine which environment is best.
  - Almost every child needs a snack and a break after school before tackling homework.
  - After school **activities** can provide a break for the child as well as a physical outlet.
    - If homework gets done without struggles, and the child gets to bed on time, after school activities are fine.
    - If after-school activities result in unpleasant or difficult evening homework sessions with a tired child, consider decreasing activities and lighten the schedule.
  - Sometimes, there is **too much homework**. If you feel that the amount or content of homework is excessive, talk to your child's teacher or to other parents.
    - Parents may need to set a limit on the amount of time their child will do homework each night.