

Information for parents

Homework

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Homework, defined as: "tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours" (Cooper, 1989, p.7), can be a challenge to many children and their parents. The following suggestions are made in an attempt to make this task more enjoyable and productive and to suggest strategies that may work primarily with primary students who experience difficulty staying on task, who are disorganised, forgetful or distracted from completing homework tasks on time.

Increasing a student's investment in homework will usually result in improved academic gains, particularly in high school. For primary school students the effect of homework on achievement is trivial, if it exists at all (Cooper, 2000). However, if during the early years, parents and teachers can establish good study skills and work habits and convey the idea that learning takes place in situations other than a classroom, this should flow over to success in the secondary years and beyond.

- Find out what the policy is towards homework and parent's involvement in it at your child's school.
- Ask what kinds of homework will be given, how it will be set and the role the school expects you, as a parent to play in your child's homework.
- Establish and maintain collaboration and consultation with your child's teachers. This may be through a communication book, the school diary, e-mailing or writing letters/notes in accordance with the school's preferred policy.
- Find out what you should do if your child has difficulty with a homework assignment or a project. It is a good idea to write a note of explanation to the class teacher outlining the difficulty encountered so that your child's teacher is aware what is happening.
- Make sure your child writes down his or her homework in a diary and at the primary level check each evening the tasks that need to be completed and handed in the next morning.
- At the secondary level, gradually reduce the direct daily supervision as appropriate, encouraging your child to take increasing responsibility for meeting his or her homework requirements.
- Remember that homework is your child's responsibility. Give reinforcement and praise for effort.
- Create a home environment that encourages and facilitates your child's learning and where you provide help and encouragement.
- Establish a routine for homework, draw up a contract with your child about the amount of time to be spent on homework and, particularly at the primary level, sign homework before it is returned to school.
- Decide upon the right time for your child to complete homework that fits in with other after school activities and your commitments.
- Remember the kitchen or dining room table can work as a place to complete homework although, as your child gets older, having his or her own desk in a quiet, separate place will help develop independent study habits. A straight-backed chair and ensuring the area is well lit can also help the homework process, as well as reducing muscle and eye strain.
- Allow your child to do homework in the morning if this suits him or her best. Often the morning is the best time to memorise tables. Hearing spelling lists and tables over breakfast can be useful revision.
- Talk to your child about schoolwork and homework and find out what interests your child most and what he or she enjoys doing



the best. Ask what was the best thing about the day. Talk about his or her friends and what he or she may do during recess or lunchtime. Likewise tell your child a little about your day and what you accomplished.

- Allow your child to relax and unwind when he or she first comes home from school. Provide a snack and a drink and then suggest he or she do something enjoyable before settling to homework. Some children, however, may prefer to do their homework straight away (after a snack and a drink) and then relax later. This is equally acceptable.
- Make sure the instructional techniques you use as a parent are similar to those used by your child's teachers.
- Concentrate on listening to your primary aged child read each night for 10 to 15 minutes. When you have finished reading for the evening ask some questions about the story, the main characters and themes in the book.
- Listen to your primary aged child go over his or her multiplication tables to consolidate work done in the classroom. You can purchase laminated multiplication tables placemats that can be kept on the table and referred to at odd moments.
- Practice your primary aged child's spelling list for 5-10 minutes each night. Use the Look/ Say/ Cover/ Write/Check method. This means your child looks closely at the word and says it aloud. You then cover the word and he/she writes it down without help. Finally you check the spelling of the word. If your child makes a mistake, go over the letters that are wrong.
- Read to your child before he or she goes to bed of an evening. This is different to having your child read to you.
- Make sure you have a supply of HB and coloured pencils, spare paper, textas and highlighters, glue, sticky tape, a stapler, a ruler, a pencil sharpener and geometry materials such as a protractor, a compass and a set square. They can be kept in a pencil case or a see through plastic container. Also, have a dictionary handy to look up the meaning and spelling of words and an atlas.
- Turn off the television during homework time. Television and homework do not go together unless your child needs to listen to the news for an assignment.

- Reinforce your child for starting his or her homework without being asked or after only a gentle reminder.
- Comment on your child's behaviour if he or she is off task or not focusing on what he or she should be doing. Always use positive words when talking to your child about completing homework. Say: "Pay attention to what you are doing" rather than: "You are not attending to your work".
- Go over homework when it has been completed and provide feedback to your child.
- Have your child pack his or her school bag at night so there is not a hassle in the morning when everyone is in a hurry to leave home. This would include packing sports equipment and any musical instruments he or she may need at school the following day.

References

- Cooper, H. M. (1989). Homework. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman.
- Cooper, H. (2000). Synthesis of research on homework. In Smith, P. K., & Pellegrini, A. D. Psychology of education: Major themes. London: RoutledgeFarmer.

For more Information

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