

Helping with Homework

Research has proven the point: children succeed in learning when their families actively support them. Helping your child with homework is a powerful way to improve your child's chances of doing well in school and in life. Your interest in your children's education sparks their enthusiasm for learning.

However, helping with homework isn't always easy! This *Bulletin* gives some practical ideas for parents, family members, and others who are helping children in elementary and middle school with homework.

Why Do Teachers Assign Homework?

Homework gives students a chance to practice what they are learning in class, and helps students get ready for the next day's classes. Teachers also give homework to help students:

- learn to use resources, such as libraries and computer Web sites;
- explore subjects more fully than class time permits;
- use skills they already have in new situations; and
- apply many different skills to a single task, such in a science project.

Homework also helps students develop good study habits and positive attitudes.

What's the Right Amount of Homework?

The right amount of homework depends on the age and skills of the child. Experts suggest that:



- In *kindergarten through second grade* children can benefit from 10 to 20 minutes of homework each school day,
- In *third through sixth grades* children can benefit from 30 to 60 minutes a school day, and
- In *seventh through ninth grades* students can benefit from spending more time on homework and the amount may vary from night to night.

If your child has problems focusing, writes slowly or has other special needs, homework can take longer. This may also be true for students who are learning to speak English as a second language. If you keep track of how long it really takes your child to do his¹ homework, you can share this information with his teachers. The teacher may have some ideas for how to help your child succeed with homework. Sometimes an understanding and sympathetic ear helps a lot.

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1. Please note: In this *Bulletin*, we refer to a child as "him" in some places and "her" in others. We do this to make it easier to read. Please understand, however, that every point we make is the same for girls and boys unless otherwise stated.

NCLB Increases Options for Parents

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), the main education law in the United States, gives important options and rights to parents. It gives two special options to parents whose children are in schools that are "in need of improvement":

School Choice Options: Parents have the right to transfer their children out of schools that have not met state improvement goals (also called "adequate yearly progress" or AYP) for two years, as long as there is space available in a school that is making adequate progress. Schools must pay the transportation fees for a child who chooses to transfer.

Supplemental Educational Services (SES) Option: Schools that have not met state improvement goals (AYP) for three years must provide free tutoring services that take place outside of school time. A student may be eligible for SES if he or she qualifies for free and reduced-price lunch.

Parents' PLACE has easy-to-read information about both of these options in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. We are also eager to speak with parents who feel their child may benefit from these options.

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How to Help

Children need to know that their family members think homework is important. If they know you care, children have a good reason to complete assignments and to turn them in on time. Here are some things you can do to show your child that you value education and homework.

Set a Regular Time for Homework.

Work with your child to make a schedule. Put the schedule in a place where you'll see it often, such as on the refrigerator door.

Pick a Place. The study area doesn't have to be fancy. It should have good lighting and be fairly quiet. Wherever your child works, you should be able to check to see if she's sticking to the task, and to offer encouragement.

Remove Distractions. Turn off the TV and discourage social phone calls during homework time. (A call to a classmate about an assignment may be helpful.) If distractions can't be avoided, your child may want to complete assignments in the local library. Some libraries have homework centers and may offer individual assistance.

Make a "Homework Survival Kit."

Include pencils, pens, erasers, writing

paper, a dictionary, and other things your child might need. Keep this kit in the study area so your child doesn't have to search for supplies every day.

Talk about the Assignments. Talking and asking questions can help your child to think through an assignment and break it down into small parts that are easier to manage. Ask your child to explain in her own words what the assignment is about. If neither you nor your child understands an assignment, call one of her classmates or get in touch with the teacher.

Give Practice Tests. When your child is studying for a test, offer to quiz him using the book or other materials the teacher has provided.

Ask the Teacher. If you don't know how to help with an assignment, ask the teacher for extra material or information that will help you. Early in the year, ask your child's teacher about any rules or guidelines that students are expected to follow as they complete homework. Talk with the teacher about your role in helping with homework. The basic rule is, "Don't do the assignments yourself." It's not your homework—it's your child's. Also, you may want to ask your child's teacher about the use of computers for homework. Computers are great learning and homework tools. Some schools may offer after-school programs that

allow students to use the school computers. And many public libraries make computers available to children.

Look over Completed Assignments.

It's usually a good idea to check to see that your elementary school child has finished her assignments. If your middle-school student is having trouble finishing assignments, check his work, too. After the teacher returns completed homework, read the comments to see if your child has done the assignment satisfactorily.

Use the Great Motivator—Praise!

"You've done a great job" can go a long way toward motivating your child to complete assignments. Also, use incentives, such as a shopping outing, time with you or a favorite friend, or some other treat of your child's choice to reward completed work. Children also need to know when they haven't done their best work. When a paper could be neater, you could say, "The teacher will understand your ideas better if you use your best handwriting." Then give praise for the neat version.

Sources: Helping Your Child with Homework. (2005). U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach. Free copies of the entire 27 page booklet are available from Parents' PLACE or by calling the Department of Education at 1-877-433-7827.

"Avoiding Homework Wars," by Diana Browning Wright. Available online at www.schwablearning.org.

BE THE POWER! Parents, for more information on how you can use the No Child Left Behind Act to be the power behind your child's education, call Parents' PLACE today. **TAP THE POWER!** Schools, for help on how to tap the power of parents to help your school succeed, call Parents' PLACE today.

PARENTS' PLACE IS READY AND EAGER TO HELP. We offer families and school personnel help through our written materials, workshops, and telephone assistance—all available in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

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