

Homework Habits

By Dr. Matt Sanders

As a new school year begins, many parents feel a certain sense of relief that the challenging role of keeping active children busy and amused throughout the long hot summer days is at an end.

But the return of schooldays also brings with it the added parenting role of homework monitor.

Children are usually expected to spend time outside of school hours doing homework and it is important that parents help their children develop good study habits and routines. The amount of time required will vary depending on the age of the child and the expectations of the school and teachers.

While this is often seen by school children as a boring task and an unfair imposition on their “free time,” it is important for children to complete set school work so they can make satisfactory progress in their education. The study skills and self-discipline children learn during the early years of schooling will not only help them cope with the later demands of high school senior, these skills will also stay with them for the entire length of their working life and beyond into retirement.

As adults we draw on our early education to know that it takes effort and attention to achieve goals, and that sometimes when things don't come easily to us we have to spend time working through problems and obstacles.

But homework shouldn't become a family battlefield filled with stress and pressure. It is an opportunity to provide encouragement and help if needed. When parents believe their child does not have a good attitude towards study or thinks they are just lazy, it can make the situation worse.

One father I know used to require his 10-year-old son to do at least one hour of math study a day. He would quiz the boy on his multiplication table and hit him with a ruler when he got an answer wrong. This approach did nothing but make the boy so uptight about schoolwork that his grades became worse and worse.

The key to good homework habits lies in preparation. Your child should have a set time for homework that fits in around your schedule and your child's other commitments such as sports, club activities or music lessons. Homework should be given high priority and come sometime between when your child has had a chance

to relax after arriving home from school or after-school care and before they are allowed to play or watch television.

Relaxing immediately after school is as important for children as the after-work wind-down period we adults usually find so necessary. Remember, children should not turn on the television immediately after walking in the door from school. Instead, an afternoon snack is a pleasant relaxing way to talk with your children about their day and to find out what their homework tasks are, whether they need any special materials for projects, and when it needs to be ready.

While it is not essential for children to have absolute quiet when working, they should have a well arranged homework area that has clear table space, is well lit, and is free from obvious distractions.

Parenting Tip: If your child seeks an opinion on how good their homework is don't feel that you have to make sure the work is perfect before they hand it in. If your child has worked hard on writing a story for example they may feel discouraged if you point out all the spelling and punctuation mistakes. Instead say something positive about the work and if you must make corrections just choose one or two mistakes.

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