

HOMEWORK: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

For Parents:

Help the student schedule a time to study on a regular basis. It may be a good idea to vary it according to the season to assure that it will be kept. For example, in the spring and fall the student will want to play outside first, so set a time after dinner. In the winter when it is cold, TV will probably become more important, so an earlier time may be more feasible. Routine may be particularly important for students with learning or behavior difficulties. The routine should be agreed upon by the student and enforced whenever possible.

Make sure the homework setting is one free from distractions and one with basic resources and materials at hand. It would be a good idea to find out from the student's teacher what at-home resources would be helpful to the student, such as dictionaries, calculators, pencils, etc. Involve the student in this process by letting him/her pick out the container, supplies, etc. The study area should also have adequate lighting, as to prevent eye strain.

Allow for some flexibility. Students may differ in where they like to study. Allow flexibility in time and place of study depending on the completion of tasks. In other words, utilize whatever works best for them.

Have your student arrange his/her chair as to avoid eye strain and fatigue. Lying down while studying is generally not conducive to concentration or avoiding strain.

Establish the homework setting in an area near parents. Suggestions include the dining room or kitchen. This way parents will be able to offer assistance, encouragement, and monitoring as needed.

Work a few problems with your student in order to start the student on task and model desirable behavior.

However, parents should be cautious about offering assistance. Try to make sure the student really needs help, as homework is supposed to be an opportunity for the student to work independently. If parents are constantly helping the student, homework will fail to serve its purpose.

Avoid excessive corrections. Unnecessarily pointing out every mistake made can lead to student frustration and possible "shut down."

Do not help with homework if you are confused and cannot understand the teacher's expectations. This kind of help will only make the student more confused. Consider other resources that could help your student, including a homework hotline, a peer, an older student or relative, and other parents. Exchange phone numbers and call one another for assistance.

Teach students to take responsibility for their work. Teach them to ask questions when they don't understand and to keep track of their assignments.

Assist the student in preparing a daily schedule of tasks to be completed. Help the student in advance to budget their time from night to night and week to week to help instill valuable working habits. It may be helpful to post major due dates on a family calendar.

Help your student develop a progress chart for the school week that lists assignments by class for each school day that week. Give a star for each completed assignment block and give an overall reinforcer based on the number of assignments completed based on the improvement the student has shown.

Develop a contract with your student stating that the privilege of engaging in more desirable activities (at home or school) is dependent upon the completion of homework. The student should come to understand that he/she has the control of his/her life and academic achievement.

Start small with reinforcers. When using rewards, start off with something small and have the student work towards something bigger. For example, start off with a certificate for the student and then, based on long-term success, have the student choose something larger to work towards.

Model appropriate behavior. It is especially helpful if the parents or guardians model desired behavior and use this same time for their own personal study or reading. Remember, what you do speaks louder than what you say.

Communicate with teachers about your student's work. However, encourage the student to assume much of the responsibility. Suggestions include phone calls, emails, daily assignment sheets and agenda books, and progress reports. Also, go over these reports with your student so that everyone will know what is being done that is wrong and what is expected. Foster a working relationship with teachers at the beginning of the year in order to keep the lines of communication open throughout the year. Communicate your expectations to the teacher.

Regularly check homework sheets.

In order to keep the idea of homework and independence on nights when there is no homework assigned, it is a good idea to suggest alternatives to watching TV. Maybe have the family read together, play a game, or perhaps go see an exhibit or a concert.

Do not, however, hesitate to have the student explain legitimate explanations for night when homework could not be completed.

Please do not feel that your student must always be doing "something productive."

Productivity is enhanced when there are regularly scheduled breaks. Five to ten minute break times for each hour studying are adequate for most students. Have the student leave the studying area and rest his/her eyes or take a walk, etc.

Limit the amount of time spent doing homework. This reduces frustration and student-parent conflicts. This also teaches the student to work more efficiently.

Don't use homework time as punishment. This will foster negative attitudes about homework.

Keep a cool head. Judge your student's progress by tangible evidence (such as test scores, improved marking period grades, etc.)

If the student shows progress, the initial praise may need to be kept low-key and matter of fact. Say things like, "That's good, but we expect that."

Accept all responses and student efforts as genuine.

Be patient. Understand that your student will have good days and bad days, and that neither you nor your student should set your original expectations too high – improvement takes time!

Assure that your student gets a good night's rest, especially before tests.

For Teachers:

Schedule a routine for assigning, collecting, and evaluating homework at the beginning of the school year so that the student knows what to expect.

Inform students of the consequences of not completing homework assignments and be sure they understand them.

Develop a method of communication between home and school. A daily homework log recording assignments and due dates could be used. Parents sign it when assignments are completed and teachers use it to give feedback regarding the assignments.

Present instructions for completing assignments early. This includes the purpose of the assignment, the format to be used in completion, specific directions about the task, the due date, materials needed for completion, and the evaluation criteria that will be used in assessment. Present this information orally as well as in written format.

Allow students to begin homework in class to make sure they understand the instructions and concepts. This also allows you to resolve any problems and answer questions that would not otherwise be answered if done at home.

Additional Resources:

Keith, T. & DeGraff, M. (1997). Homework. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke, Children's needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Nathan, A. (1998). *Surviving homework: Tips that really work!* Millbrook Press Trade.

Power, T. (2001). *Homework success for students with ADHD: a family-school intervention program*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

homeworktips.about.com/cs/top25articles/: Top 25 Articles about Homework.

www.focusonlearning.org/homeworktips.pdf: Homework Tips for Parents.

www.ldresources.com/articles/homework_tips.html: Ten Homework Tips for Parents.

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