

Taking the Hassle Out of Homework



Many children struggle with homework, which can cause parents to feel frustrated and confused about how best to help them. Some parents wonder how they can strike the right balance between letting their children struggle alone and doing it for them. Other parents are frustrated to find themselves, night after night, in a power struggle over homework with their children.

Doing homework is a learned process. Young learners don't automatically know how to do a worksheet, how to approach every math problem or where to look to find answers. For young students, doing homework is new. They are required to complete and hand in their homework on time or face negative consequences. They may also have feelings about the grades they receive for their work. So, right from the start, children are dealing with a lot. Some children approach this new process with enthusiasm and optimism, while others may feel anxious, overwhelmed or less motivated.

Completing homework isn't helped by the fact that young children, and even adolescents, routinely underestimate the time it takes to do their homework. This is developmentally appropriate behavior. They truly believe that it will take only five minutes or believe they hardly have any homework at all. It is helpful to keep in mind that children have an immature sense of time and their time management skills are not yet developed (a skill many adults themselves are working to master!). When children realize the cold hard fact that their assignments take far more time and effort than they had bargained for, they

can feel overwhelmed and discouraged, making it even harder to get started. In the higher grades, students are required to juggle complex subject matter with more long-term assignments and varying timeframes, not to mention the pull of extracurricular activities and spending time with peers. And this is all happening as they are dealing with the numerous developmental changes and challenges.

If despite your best efforts your child continues to find it hard to do homework, and you find yourself getting into power struggles, seek the

help of a patient and caring tutor. You will accomplish the goal of getting your child the help she needs, while also protecting your relationship from the conflict that homework seems to trigger.

Your relationship with your child matters most. The love and closeness of your relationship will foster your child's inner-happiness - the most important indicator of a child's academic success. Over time, your positive approach to helping your child do her homework will help her to become a confident, joyful, life-long learner.

What can you do to help your child with homework?

- The good news is that there is an effective middle ground between giving up in defeat or using a harsh, punitive approach when children struggle to do their homework. It is possible for you to help your child do her homework, while preserving her happiness.
- First and foremost, take the long view and keep in mind your ultimate goal: to help your child develop a life-long love of learning.
- Be available to hear your child's feelings about what it's like being a student and her feelings about school, all of which impact her learning and motivation for homework. Sometimes it is hard when kids realize they cannot know or do everything perfectly in school. Help your child understand that learning entails making mistakes
- Set a consistent homework time before or after dinner. Let your child decide. If you give your child a choice, they will feel cared about and empowered, and more likely to be motivated to do their work.
- Approach homework from a positive perspective. Minimize distractions by turning off the television or radio. Sit with your child or be nearby so you can help if she asks for help. Make it a relationship experience rather than a solitary one.
- If your child is struggling, but trying, and not asking for help, let her work on her own and at her own speed. When your child does ask for help, respond right away. Don't make her beg for answers or say, "you can do it!", or "sound it out!" or any number of responses that add pressure to the situation and can make it harder for her.
- If your child is clearly making mistakes on her homework, but declines your help, do not force the issue. Allow the teacher to be the "bad guy" to help her correct her work. (Remember that your goal is to build on, and allow space for your child to discover his or her own motivation to do her best).
- Be positive, gentle, and kind while your child is learning. Never use put-downs or get mad when your child is trying. While it can feel frustrating at times when helping your child, it is better to take a break (a parent time-out) than to become angry.

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for three to six year olds, and parent and child programs for children six weeks to 36 months. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism[®]. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapsychic Humanism Society), parent training and support programs, and publications. © 2019 Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Chicago Location: Natalie & Ben Heineman Smart Love Center, 2222 N. Kedzie Blvd., Chicago, IL 60647
Oak Park Location: 1010 Lake Street, Suite 500, Oak Park, IL 60301

773.665.8052, ext. 4 | www.smartlovefamily.org