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By Judy Molland

What You and Your Child Can Do to Ensure Hassle-Free Homework

Parents differ on how much schoolwork they'd like their children to bring home each day. Teacher attitudes differ as well. Evidence suggests that the right amount of homework, designed appropriately for a child's developmental level, does promote learning.

As a general rule of thumb, the National Education Association (NEA) and the national Parent Teacher Association (PTA) suggest starting with 10 minutes of homework per night in first grade and incrementally adding 10 minutes with each grade level. Thus, a second-grader should be assigned 20 minutes of homework, a third-grader 30 minutes, a fourth-grader 40 minutes, and so on – not to exceed two hours per night in high school. More often than not, homework overload is an exercise in futility, because the student can feel overwhelmed by the quantity of work, become distracted or bored, and end up making a halfhearted effort just to get it done.

Harris Cooper, Ph.D., a professor and director of education at Duke University, has reviewed more than 100 studies on the effectiveness of homework. In general, he



Homework needs to reinforce what happens in the classroom, not teach new material or supplant classwork.

has found that the benefits of doing homework seem to depend on the student's grade level. In high school, students who regularly do homework outperform those who do not. In middle school, homework is half as effective, and in elementary school, it has no apparent measurable effect on achievement. Still, homework at the elementary level is important and has a potentially long-term impact: it helps younger children form effective study skills, which in turn influence grades and learning.

Homework needs to reinforce what happens in the classroom, not teach new material or supplant classwork. The teacher-student relationship can be likened to sports coaches and players: while players can go out and practice on their own, hour after hour, the best learning occurs when the coach is right there,

explaining and demonstrating new plays and skills and immediately correcting any flaws.

Parents' Role

You can expect to work with your child quite a bit when he is in first or second grade, but by fourth grade, it's reasonable for him to be doing the work himself and then having you check it. Once he's in fifth grade, your role is to be more of a supervisor. Some children may still need a parent close by, not necessarily for help, but just as a supportive presence.

If you see that your child is having trouble with homework, resist the urge to rush in and rescue or reprimand. Instead, begin by figuring out exactly what's going on. Check if your child is writing down the assignment correctly, bring-



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ing her assignment book home and getting the finished work into her backpack to return to class. If she's simply not doing the work, find out why: Is your child struggling because the work is too difficult? Does she seem to have too much homework or not enough? Let the teacher know the situation.

Doing homework gives your child an opportunity to develop responsibility and self-discipline. Remembering assignments, organizing materials, gathering information, and budgeting time are important skills your child will need throughout life.

Eight Tools of the Trade

1 A routine – Set a pattern for yourself and your child. For example, half an hour of downtime after school followed by a snack, homework, then dinner at 6 p.m. Or maybe homework takes place after supper. The point is to plan a routine that works for you and your child and to keep it consistent.

2 A place – Arrange a comfortable place for your child to do homework, such as in his room, at the kitchen table or in a quiet corner of the living room.

3 Parameters for your child – Ensure that your child has everything she needs to be productive. Some children really do work better if they are listening to music, although not with the TV on.

4 Parameters for you – Ask teachers about their homework policies. How much time should the homework take? How much involvement from parents does the teacher expect?

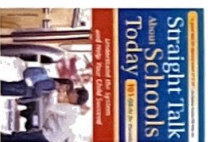
5 Role modeling – Set a good example. Children are more motivated to do homework when they see parents doing “homework,” too. Sit down and go through the mail, pay bills, read or catch up on correspondence.

6 Tools – Provide supplies and resources (pencils, pens, paper, an assignment book and a dictionary). Keep everything together in one place.

7 Ongoing interest – Show an interest. Ask your child about class topics and assignments. Post long-term projects on the refrigerator or family bulletin board. Attend school activities. Be available to answer questions.

8 Appropriate help – Monitor homework. Help your child understand assignments, get organized and structure time, but do not do the work for him. ♦

Redwood City's Judy Molland is a veteran teacher and long-time education writer for *Bay Area Parent*. This article is excerpted from *Straight Talk About Schools Today: Understand the System and Help Your Child Succeed*, by Judy Molland, © 2007. Used with permission of Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, Minn.; 800-735-7323; www.freepsirit.com. All rights reserved.



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