



Helping with HOMEWORK

Aimed at parents of children aged up to about 14.

Studies in Britain have shown that children who are supported by their families with homework are likely to perform significantly better in academic examinations at 16 years old and beyond than those who do not. If we want our children to be successful in school, family involvement is important.

How can you help?

1. By showing an interest you are communicating the fact that school work is important and needs to be taken seriously.
2. Encourage children to complete homework to the best of their ability.
3. Urge children to watch less television and spend more time studying and reading.
4. Express high expectations for children from an early age.

The Benefits

Parents who take an interest in their children's homework have a better knowledge of their education. Additionally, children who are able to complete assignments successfully are likely to develop a good working attitude.

Why is Homework Important?

Homework set prior to a lesson can aid understanding later in class. Homework also provides opportunities for reinforcement of work learned during school time and for children to develop their research skills. Children will need to seek information for themselves from reference materials such as encyclopedias, books, CD Roms and by doing so, are helped along the path to becoming independent learners.

Having the responsibility of needing to meet deadlines promotes self-discipline, an attribute which will impact on school work and beyond.

How much Homework?

At the beginning of the school year ask about the school's homework policy. You need to know what kind of homework will be set, the guidelines for time to be spent and the school's expectations of your input. Some schools have homework diaries so you can see what homework

is being given. If problems occur such as your child is taking far too long to complete assignments you should contact your child's teacher.

Practical Ways to Help

1. Provide a quiet environment

Provide a quiet, well lit study area. Avoid distractions such as the television and loud music. Encourage other family members to be quiet, especially youngsters.

2. Have a Regular Homework Routine

Obviously household routines differ. Late at night is rarely a good time to study, as children are tired. You may need to be flexible if your child attends outside activities. Try to get a balance, but homework is a priority. If it is being rushed then consider reducing after school commitments or television viewing. Having a routine helps to avoid excuses such as "I'll do it after this programme" or "I forgot." It is important that a child learns to take responsibility rather than having to rely on reminders. Also do not expect your child to work on an empty stomach. No-one works well when they are hungry.

3. Praise Effort and Achievement

It is vital to praise a child for his or her efforts and achievements. Positive comments are more effective than critical ones. A child can become disaffected if continually reminded of shortcomings. Building self-esteem is very important if a child is to try with school work.

4. Show an Interest

Make time to talk about school in daily conversations. Take your child to the library if he or she needs to access reference materials such as books and CD-Roms. Librarians can also guide your child where to look for information. You can give your child a good start if you read with your child and discuss current reading books, at least up to the age of eleven.

5. Provide Equipment

Ensure your child has basic equipment such as pens, pencils, a ruler, erasers, a dictionary and writing paper. Other useful items could include paper clips, a calculator, scissors, glue, a thesaurus and sticky tape. These should be kept together. Homework bags are a good idea because books can be carried to and from school safely.

Personal computers are not vital to successful home study, they obviously have great benefits in terms of being able to access information quickly from CD Roms or Internet.

6. Set a Good Example

Children's attitudes to homework are mainly influenced by their parents' guidance and examples. They are more likely to want to study if they see you reading and writing. Remember that educational visits can also support learning.

7. Monitor Homework

Obviously how closely children need to be monitored is dependent on several factors:

- the age of the child
- how able your child is academically
- how independently your child is able to work

It is a good idea to check homework over. It is important to remember that the homework is not yours, but your child's. If you do the assignments you are not helping him or her to become an independent learner. Discuss with your child's teacher what support is expected from you.

Problems with Homework

From time to time you may have concerns about homework. Meet with teachers early in the school year and ask them to let you know if difficulties arise.

Some problems which may arise are:

- the homework can regularly be too hard or too easy
- your child refuses to do assignments despite encouragement
- your child has problems completing assignments on time
- you would like your child to do homework missed through illness
- neither your child nor you understand the homework
- your child is taking too much or too little time on homework
- there may be too much work on some nights and too little on others
- your child is becoming distressed over homework

Whatever the problem, communicate with school at an early stage and work together to bring about a resolution. Meet with your child's teacher to discuss the situation. If you do have a complaint avoid aggressive confrontations. Try to talk in a calm, cooperative manner and the teacher will be more inclined to find a way round the problem.

By helping your child with homework you not only improve his or her chances of achievement in school and in life, but you can help to develop your child's confidence, self-discipline and sense of responsibility.