

HOMework

How to Motivate Your Child



Homework can be an important tool to help children review and practice the skills taught in school and can improve their learning. In addition, homework can help enhance children's personal growth by teaching them responsibility, independent work habits, organization, and time management. However, when problems arise, homework can be quite disruptive to family life by creating parent-child conflict and interfering with other important family priorities, such as recreation and social activities. One of the more common homework problems reported by parents is poor motivation, particularly in families with children with learning or attention deficit disorders. Children who are described as motivated to do homework do it by themselves, begin and complete it on time, actively participate in checking it, respond well when told to correct it, pay attention during it,

and stick with it even when it gets difficult. When children display problems with any of these areas of homework, they are frequently described as being unmotivated. The tips described below are specific strategies and techniques parents can use to motivate their children to successfully do their homework on time and on their own.

Tip #1: Provide well-lit work area, equipped with needed supplies

You can support your child's efforts to complete his homework by providing him with the right workspace at home. A good work area is one that has adequate space, is well lit, has the needed supplies (see list to right) and is relatively free from distractions.

- Pencils/pens/markers
 - Pencil sharpener
 - Eraser
 - White out
 - Glue/paste/tape
 - Writing paper
 - Index cards
 - Ruler
 - Scissors
 - Stapler
 - Calculator
 - Dictionary/Thesaurus
- Homework
Supplies**

Tip #2: Control and limit meaningful distractions

Some children and adolescents frequently choose to do their homework while listening to a radio or watching TV, claiming that it helps them focus. In many situations, this may be true. However, certain types of noise in certain situations may be distracting.

Audio and visual distractions will tend to interfere more with difficult assignments than with easy and routine assignments. In addition, meaningful background sounds, such as TV, speech, and vocal music, tend to be more distracting than instrumental music or other nonvocal background noise. As a general rule, you should try and control and limit meaningful distractions, such as telephone, TV, vocal music, and interruptions from others during homework time, particularly during difficult assignments. Do not worry as much about nonvocal background noise during easy and routine assignments, if your child is completing her work.

Tip # 3: Help your child develop a daily and weekly schedule of homework and other activities

One of the benefits of homework is that it can help children develop their skills in organization and managing their time. Homework can interfere with important social and recreational activities if the child does not plan ahead. Teach your child how to make both daily and weekly

schedules for her activities (see figure below). On a daily basis, have your child decide what needs to be done that day and when to do it. This should include a listing of all homework assignments and other activities and responsibilities. It is often a good idea to decide ahead of time on the order of homework assignments, sandwiching the harder assignments in between the easier assignments. At the beginning of the week, it is helpful to list out all the activities for the coming week. This will help your child plan. For example, if your child has a Social Studies test on Wednesday and she needs two days to study for it, she can plan on bringing her Social Studies book home Monday and Tuesday nights.

Things To Do Today	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
3:00-3:30 Snack and watch TV		Baseball	SS	Book	Spelling		Pool
3:30-4:30 Homework:		game 7:30	Test!!!	report	test		party
1. Read			Guitar	due			4:00
2. Math worksheet			lesson				
3. Write out spelling words			5:00				
4:30-5:00 Eat supper							
5:00-6:30 Baseball practice							
6:30-7:30 Play outside							
7:30-8:00 Practice instrument							

Daily and weekly schedule example

Tip #4: Find out how much and how often homework is expected

In order to effectively monitor your child’s homework you need to know what to expect. Check with your child’s teacher about the school’s homework policy and find out how much and how often homework is expected at your child’s grade level. Based on surveys of students and teachers from across the country, you should expect your child to have some homework to do each week. You should expect the number of nights and the amount of homework to increase as your child progresses from elementary to high school (see table below). If your child is spending more or less time than is expected on homework, check with your child and the teacher to find out why.

Level	Amount	Nights per week
3 rd -6 th grade	30 to 45 minutes	3
7 th -9 th grade	45-75 minutes	4
10 th -12 th grade	75-120 minutes	4 or more

Tip #5: Do not help your child do his homework

This tip has to do with your role concerning homework. The trend in schools today is for parents to be involved with their children’s schooling. However, what role should you play in your child’s homework? A national survey of school district policies showed that schools most often recommend that parents play a supportive role rather than a teaching role. The purpose of homework is usually to give students a chance to practice skills already taught in school. You should not have to tutor your child or help him complete his homework. Helping your child do homework may increase his dependency on you. Your goal should be to provide your child with the support he needs to complete his homework on his own. Many of the tips discussed in this handout are suggestions on how to you can provide your child with support.

Tip #6: Be supportive and encouraging, avoid criticism and punishment

Your general approach with your child around homework should be positive. Avoid using criticism or punishment to try to get your child to do her homework, these strategies will work against what you are trying to accomplish in the long run. You want your child to approach new

challenges with confidence in her abilities, to have a feeling that she has control over her learning, and to be proud of her accomplishments. These goals are accomplished through being supportive and encouraging over time. When problems arise, your job should be to understand the problem and come up with solutions.

Tip #7: Praise efforts and independence

Parents should make a special effort to give their children frequent praise for the effort that they put into homework and their attempts to work independently. Praise effort and independence, even if they don't get everything correct the first time. A general rule for using praise is to do it often, immediately, and powerfully. A powerful praise is one that is given in a warm tone of voice and includes a statement letting the child know what it is you are please with. For example, "I really like how you worked hard on your homework tonight! And you did it all by yourself! I am very proud of you!" Frequent praise that is related directly to children's effort and independence can produce in them positive emotions, confidence, and an increased sense of control over learning. When this happens, children are likely to independently put forth effort and persist at new learning challenges.

Tip #8: Monitor your child's daily homework

One of the ways that you can communicate to your child that homework is important is by asking him about it each day. It may be necessary for you to review the assignment with your child before he begins the assignment to make sure he understands what he is supposed to do; however, you should not sit with or help him throughout the assignment.

Tip #9: Check your child's completed homework for neatness and accuracy and give feedback

When the assignment is done, check it for neatness and accuracy. Messy work should be redone. If errors are found, have your child correct them. For younger children, show them which items are incorrect and have them correct them on their own. As they get older, you can give them more general feedback. For example, you can tell your child how many errors you found on a page or in a set of items, without telling her which ones are incorrect, and have her find and correct them on her own. This will give your child practice in proofreading and checking.

Tip #10: Communicate with the teacher

Homework is a partnership between school and home designed to improve your child's learning. Do not be afraid to contact your child's teacher when problems occur. Consider talking with the teacher when any of the following occur.

- **When your child has very little homework.** Is this because the teacher is not assigning homework, or is your child failing to report assignments to you?
- **When your child fails to remember assignments or bring home books or materials.** When this happens, you may need to have your child and teacher use a homework journal or card to keep track of assignments (see example below).
- **When your child does not know how to do homework assignments.** Homework should focus on simple skills and on the integration of skills that the student already possesses. Homework should not be used to teach complex skills. When your child has problems with understanding how to do an assignment, it may be that the assignment requires skills that

your child has not yet mastered. It could also indicate that your child is having problems in class, such as problems with paying attention or learning a particular skill.

Homework Log		
NAME: _____		DATE: _____
<i>Subject</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Teacher Signature</i>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

- **When your child is spending too much time with homework.** Too much homework can demoralize your child and interfere with other family priorities, such as recreation, social activities, and parent-child relationships. If your child is consistently spending too much time on homework, check and see if he is bringing home work that should be completed during school hours. This may be an indication of a problem with your child’s classroom performance. As a general rule, class work should be completed in class. If your child is consistently not getting his work done in class, the school may need to provide classroom modifications or other services to address the problem. If your child is making good use of his time during homework and is able to successfully complete the work, but it is more time than the teacher expects, ask the teacher to consider reducing the workload.

Tip #11: Use a Goal Setting Strategy

Goal setting is a very useful strategy for improving homework performance and independence. It improves motivation by assisting children in managing their own homework, providing immediate feedback, and rewarding goal accomplishment. Goal setting includes the following steps.

- **Divide daily homework assignment into smaller goals.** Work together with your child to divide the evening homework assignment into a several smaller, specific goals. The goals should be challenging but attainable, and include the amount to be completed, a time limit for completion, and accuracy rate. For example, 10 problems will be completed in 10 minutes with 80% accuracy.
- **Use a timer.** Use a kitchen timer to help your child monitor elapsed time. Reset the timer for each goal.
- **Limit requests for help.** In order to encourage your child to work independently on her homework, before each goal period tell her that she can only ask for help once during that period.
- **Record each goal performance on a chart.** Have your child evaluate whether she achieved the goal she set and confirm it for her. Record it on a worksheet. Record the percentage of goals achieved on a weekly chart. Incomplete or inaccurate portions of the goal can be incorporated into the next goal.
- **Set daily and weekly goals.** Daily and weekly goals need to be set at a level that represents improvement toward a desired end goal. It is important to initially set the goal at a level that is achievable by the child. If the goal is set too high, she may perceive it to be unachievable and will, therefore, not put forth the effort. It is important that your child experience the rewards early in the program. The best way of establishing the starting goal is to set it slightly above the level your child was performing before starting the program. Goals can be gradually adjusted upward based on the performance of the previous day or week.

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Sample Goal-Setting Worksheet

Number	Goal	Time to complete	Achieved Goal?
1	Complete 10 math problems	10 minutes	Yes
2	Complete 10 math problems	10 minutes	Yes
3	Read 4 pages in Social Studies	10 minutes	No
4	Read 2 pages in Social Studies and write spelling words two times	10 minutes	Yes

Total number of goals set: **4**

Number of goals achieved: **3**

Percentage of goals achieved (number achieved/number set): **75%**

- **Praise accomplishment of goals.** Always use immediate and powerful praise for each goal met and for the effort she is putting into her work.
- **Encourage your child to self-reinforce.** Encourage your child to use positive self-statements for progress, such as “I did great job!”
- **Create a daily and weekly reward menu.** Work with your child to make a menu of daily rewards (for example, small toy, stay up 15 minutes later, special snack, play game with parent, etc.) and weekly rewards (for example, movie, trip to the ice cream store, having a friend spend the night, go to the park, etc.). New rewards should be continually rotated into the reward menus in order to keep the rewards meaningful. What may be rewarding to a child one week may be less so the next week.
- **Provide daily and weekly rewards for goals met.** Be sure to consistently provide the promised rewards when your child achieves her daily and weekly goals.

Tip #12: Model Learning

Most children and adolescents adopt the values of their parents. Show your children that you value learning by doing educational activities in their presence. Let them see you reading. Have reading materials readily available in the house. Talk with them about current events. Take them with you to the library.



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For additional resources, visit our website:

www.parenting-ed.org

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