

A
PARENT'S GUIDE
TO
SOLVING
HOMEWORK PROBLEMS

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A Parent's Guide to Solving Homework Problems

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A Parent's Guide to Solving Homework Problems



Is your child unable to focus on homework? Does he forget to bring home his homework? Does he speed through work, produce sloppy work, resist work, procrastinate or rely too heavily on your help?

You most likely purchased this guide because your child is experiencing homework problems. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say you and your child are experiencing homework

problems?

Problems with homework can be very stressful to family life and in many cases result in parent-child relationship break-down.

As a teacher for many years, I have witnessed many families stressed, anxious, frustrated and angry as a result of homework problems at home.

If this is happening in your family, take heart. There are simple and effective ways to relieve and eliminate the stress and friction caused by homework problems.

IS THERE A PROBLEM?



The first thing you need to determine is whether there is a problem. If you and your child are tearing your hair out, yelling and screaming at each other over homework issues then it is an easy diagnosis.

There is a difference between occasional problems and regular problems. We all have an off day now and then. Gentle reminders and prompts to do homework are also normal for most families.

However, if the homework issue is pervasive, with regular excuses for homework not done and constant battles to get your child to complete homework then there obviously is a problem.



While this analysis might seem somewhat simplistic, there sometimes is a thin line between determining whether you and your child have a homework problem or not. In some instances it may be a demanding parent expecting perfection.

If there is even the slightest doubt in your mind, call your child's teacher and get another perspective. If the teacher is noticing similar behaviours in class then that will help you to make a sound analysis.

If you have gotten this far and determined that there really is no problem, then simply return this eBook to me for a full refund! Congratulations!

If however, you know you and your child have a homework issue, then the next step is determining what is causing the homework problem?

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DETERMINING THE PROBLEM



One of the first things you need to establish is can your child handle the material. Students can be experiencing difficulties with the level of the material and not tell you or the teacher. They feel vulnerable and afraid to admit to something they may see as a fault or weakness.

You will need to do a little detective work: talk with your child and ask her what the problem is; phone the teacher and get her perspective; is it one subject or more?

If it is more than one subject that your child is experiencing difficulties with, then have the school assess your child...more on this later.

If you discover that your child is experiencing difficulties with a particular subject at school then you need to arrange a meeting with the teacher. Ask the teacher to summarize what, in her opinion, is the problem your child is having and how to fix it. Together you should come up with a plan to remedy the situation.

A tutor may also be in the cards to give your child the extra help she needs to get a solid grip of the material.

FORGETFUL CHILDREN



For some kids, getting homework to and from school is a difficult task.

First thing you need to do is ensure your child has a homework book and that the teacher checks it each afternoon before dismissal after your child has written down his homework assignments.

Tell your child to ensure that after the teacher check, he has placed, in his backpack, all the texts and exercise books he needs to complete the homework.

At home, when all the homework is done, tell your child he cannot do anything until he has placed the homework book and all texts and exercise books back in his back pack and placed it by the door.

Stay on top of this consistently until your child does it without having to be reminded. Practice does make perfect, so take the time to help your child develop this habit.

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SLOPPY/SPEEDY WORKERS



Sloppy, untidy work is not accepted by teachers and (most) parents. It is usually a clear indication that the creator has rushed and has little if any pride in his work.

If teachers and parents insist on an 'acceptable level' of neatness and quality, and insist it be redone until it is acceptable, it will soon become obvious to the speedy producer, that doing it right once is much quicker than having to redo the assignment two or three times.

Parents can encourage neatness and quality by:

1. Monitoring the child's homework at regular intervals (yes, dad, you have to do something!).
2. Create check points e.g.: 30 Math examples – "Come to see me after completing ten." (this is where you check the neatness and quality).
3. Establish a homework time block with a set amount of time. If child completes all homework before the time is up, they must read until the time is up (this slows down the child rushing to move on to a more enjoyable activity).
4. Of course TV, video games, internet, cell phones, devices, etc., etc. are totally out of the picture until homework time is done.

At this point there may be some of you thinking that these homework ideas require a lot of work. Well...not to spoil your world...but yes this homework problem will require some work on your part...consider it your homework...live with it.

If you are one of the above, I have purposely placed this next section here as it may be of more benefit to you.

RESISTORS



Children (parents?) who resist doing homework are usually indicating that there is something else going on...your job is to find out what it is.

Talk with your child to see if you can determine what is going on. Has something changed at home or at school? Are they upset about anything?

Use your skills at 20 Questions to try and elicit what is going on in their mind that prevents them from being able to start & complete homework.

Try to determine if the problem is due to the fact that they are struggling with the material – do they find it hard?

Is it an attention problem – do they find it hard to concentrate for more than a few minutes?

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Do they feel lost? Do they need extra help?

If you are lucky enough or not to discover what the problem may be, your next step is to contact the teacher. Meet with her and try to come to a consensus as to what is causing your child's resistance to homework and what steps can be taken to resolve the problem. Working hand-in-hand with your child's teacher is usually the best way to get positive results.

Again, remember: any plan devised to help your child must be followed through by you. No plan, no matter how good, will fail without consistent parent support.

FOCUS/LACK OF ATTENTION



If the problem is FOCUS (your child cannot spend more than a few minutes before she loses concentration) then you will need to break the work up into 10 or 15 minutes chunks. Place a timer on your child's desk and ask her to come and show you what she has accomplished when it rings.

Look carefully at the **amount** of work completed, its **neatness** and **quality**. Comment on each aspect. Let the child know what is good and what needs to be improved. Continue this practise until all three aspects of the work reach a level that you feel is acceptable (this could take days or weeks!). Once you have reached this goal, set the timer for a longer period of time and go through the process a second time.

Do NOT sit with your child. Do not monitor them while they are supposed to be working. Remember your goal is to develop independent work skills in your child.

NOTE: An inability to focus may be symptomatic of a bigger problem. If your child exhibits this inability with other subjects or other aspects of daily life then you need to seek the help of a specialist. The school should be the first place to begin your search.

PROCRASTINATORS



The procrastinator likes to wait until the last minute to get homework done. For most children, this is usually what they are accustomed to doing. If this is the case with your child, then your task is to break a habit that is well engrained (good luck!).

If your child procrastinates with long-term assignments, then it is your job to ensure that these types of assignments are started the day they are assigned, and you and your child have agreed upon how many minutes must be spent on this assignment each night. A log should be kept to ensure the agreed upon time is adhered to and the parent should check each block of work to ensure enough has been completed in the allotted time.

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If your child procrastinates with starting homework each night, a timer is a good tool to help you and your child solve the procrastination problem.

At the start of each homework session ensure your child is seated in the place where they do homework and they are prepared to start on time.

Set the timer for 10 or 15 minutes and leave them to work. When the timer rings they have to bring the work they have completed in that time to you. If you are not satisfied with the amount completed let them know what needs to be done for the next block of time.

Another approach is to take the amount of work to be completed - say 30 Math examples – and establish a small chunk of work – say 10 examples – to be completed in a certain amount of time. If the child does not complete the amount of work allocated for that 10 or 15 minute period then you need to tell them to readjust their rate so it is completed on time.

Remember ‘Practice makes Perfect’. Your child needs **time management guidance** – something that is not usually taught in school. Set the homework block for each day and homework **MUST** be completed in that time.

HELPLESS SYNDROME



The helpless syndrome is characterized by a child who places little faith in her own abilities. She exhibits a lack of confidence and frequently asks her parents for assistance. While a child should feel free to ask parents when a difficulty with homework is encountered, there is a point at which the requests for help are too frequent and unnecessary.

You can begin to remedy this behaviour by setting an amount of time – say 10-15 minutes – and tell the child that they have to do all the work they can by themselves in that time. If they encounter difficulties they are to move onto the next question and wait for you to come and see what they have accomplished.

Once you have the child working in small blocks of time on their own, slowly increase the amount of time, but now let them come to you after the block of time is over if they have questions or need help. You will still need to set a reasonable time for them to work independently and attempt the assignment before asking questions.

You are there to support them – not do it for them.

Remember, you still have to check the quality, quantity and neatness of the work. Do not accept work that is lacking in any of these three areas.

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If your child comes to you with a question that you know they could answer themselves, do not chastise them – instead ask questions that will help them to come up with the answer, then say, “See how you solved this question? Next time try to use this way to find the answer yourself.”

The solutions offered above are simple to initiate – the real difficulty is maintaining the routine, being consistent and retaining your patience and sense of humor.

SOLUTIONS FROM SCHOOL



When parents, teachers and the school work together, solutions can usually be found in just one or two conferences.

Contact the Teacher if you notice consistent errors in one subject area or if homework is becoming an on-going struggle.

Be prepared to describe the negative behaviors or habits of your child to the teacher.

Schools have specialist staff (Psychologists, Councillors, Learning Assistance Teachers, etc.) who are equipped to provide support and solutions.

If necessary, homework assignments can be modified by the teacher to help your child stay on a curriculum track and provide him the opportunity for success.

The success that a child experiences through modification of assignments helps to promote self-confidence and increase self-esteem.

With specialized help, your child can develop an “I Can” attitude and as success is achieved the level of expectations can be slowly increased.

Homework should always be a beneficial exercise – not a make work project. The material should always be work that was introduced and explained in class – if your child seems to not have a clue how to do the work then this is most likely an indication that he was not paying attention in class or the material is too difficult.

MOTIVATING AT HOME



The debate continues whether it is better to **punish** or provide **incentives** to get children to work more efficiently and effectively.

You can find arguments for and against each method. I believe neither is correct – it is really what works with your child.



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When talking with your child about how to motivate them to overcome their homework problem, it is important to first review/talk about the problem. Make sure you both are on the same page when it comes to understanding exactly what the homework problem is.

Once you have established the problem, it is then time to talk about what if anything you can do to help motivate them. Be careful here for it could be a nasty trap for you.

Try to lay some ground work by first talking about how you are there to help and provide guidance (i.e. you are there to ensure they stay on track and follow any plan agreed upon). Try to avoid any actual rewards or punishments – rather talk about how, with your guidance and their commitment, the problem could be resolved without resorting to either.

Talk about what specific expectations you have and try to resolve that neither punishment nor rewards will be used. If you cannot get to this point, then determine with your child what method would help them the best.



At this point it is time to put things in writing so no one forgets what was agreed upon – in other words – a contract.

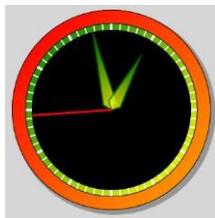
The contract should clearly indicate the expectations and rewards/consequences.

When it is signed off – post it – as a constant reminder of what everyone's obligations are.

A good contract should indicate:

1. Scheduled time & place
2. Elimination of all distractions
3. Getting homework to and from school
4. Quality, quantity and neatness
5. Attitude – no whining, no procrastination, no forgetting, no relying on parents to do the homework
6. Preparedness – have all materials, books, pens, etc. required to complete the assignments properly.
7. Rewards/ consequences – if any were decided upon

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By taking the time to develop a good understanding with your child of what the problem is and how you both will go about correcting it you empower your child to gain control over their learning.

This method also provides immediate feedback to the parent on whether the child is responsibly fulfilling his obligations on a nightly basis.

A final note on rewards and consequences:

- Specific praise is a powerful reward (e.g.: "Hey! I am glad to see you remembered to put your backpack by the door!") – also praise your child in front of others – it is a great tonic.
- Rewards need not be elaborate (e.g.: having a friend over for a pajama party)
- Natural consequences are good (e.g.: let child face a poor grade for homework incomplete)
- If you must give a consequence make it immediate – long lasting consequences have little effect over time – avoid too hash a consequence – focus on the positive.

SUMMARY



Solving your child's homework issues requires commitment and time from both you and your child.

Remember to determine if the problem is pervasive or not.

Make sure the homework problem is not just you demanding unreasonable goals be met.

Pinpoint the problem by talking with your child.

Create a description of the problem and then consult with the teacher.

Discuss and prepare an action plan.

FOLLOW THROUGH!!!

Motivate your child preferably without many incentives or consequences.



In closing it is worth mentioning that most children emulate the behaviours and attitudes of their parents. Keep this in mind when you are finding it hard to remain cool and reasonable with your child's homework struggles.