

Eleven Ways Parents Can Help with Homework

Homework often gets a bad rap, but in middle school it can help children develop *habits of mind or skills* that can serve them well as they proceed through school and life.

Homework helps children learn how to plan and organize tasks, manage time, make choices, and problem solve, all of which are skills that contribute to effective functioning in the adult world. Instilling some basic and consistent routines for homework completion can help preserve family harmony, limit nagging, minimize resistance, and ensure your child focuses on building the skills he or she needs to be successful at school.

1. Provide a suitable environment and materials: For some children, a quiet, well-lit space away from distractions is appropriate. For others, a communal space, such as a kitchen table is best.
2. Make homework time a tech-free time for the whole house. Turn off the television, the radio, the cell phone and all other electronics. The goal is to create a "library" atmosphere for a specified amount of time to allow your child to focus on the work.
- 3.. Establish a consistent homework time and schedule. Some children may need an after-school break and snack before hitting the books while others may need to stay in the school mode to get it done. Setting up a specific and consistent "homework hour" allows parents to move away from the language of threats ("If you don't... you won't be able to...") to a language of opportunities ("As soon as" you have finished... we'll have a chance to...").
4. Be available as a resource. Whenever possible, parents should be present or nearby during homework time to answer questions, provide encouragement, or look over the work. Review assignments with your child to make sure he/she understands what to do and has the necessary materials (dictionary, paper, pens, pencils, etc.) to complete the work.
5. Resist the urge to do the work for them. It's tempting sometimes to simply give them the answers when they ask. Instead, ask questions that help your child find the answer on her own or see the problem in smaller, sequential steps that can lead to completion and mastery of a skill.
6. Make sure your child is using his or her planner and regularly check what he's writing down in it. BMS provides a planner to each student so that they can keep track of their homework assignments. Some children need reinforcement from both teachers and parents to get in the habit of using a planner successfully. When your child is finished with homework, compare the work and the planner assignment to make sure everything is done.

7. Connect with your child's teacher and the school. See if your child's teacher has a website where homework due dates are listed and find out about BMS' Homework Help and tutoring services if needed. Share concerns you have about the amount or type of homework assigned or if your child isn't using his planner. Be sure to let the teacher know if your child is regularly having difficulty or is unable to do most work by himself.

8. Review graded work and mistakes: Look over completed and graded assignments that come home. Don't scold your child for bad grades or mistakes. Discuss errors to be sure your child understands the material. Incorrect answers are an opportunity to learn, and those tough questions might be asked again, so it's smart to help your child learn the correct answer when the material is fresh in his mind.

9. Keep up healthy habits: Studies have shown that reduced sleep accounts for an increase in academic problems. Many kids fall short of the 8.5+ hours that their growing bodies need. If your child's after-school schedule is booked solid with activities, it might be time to rethink extracurriculars. Children need time to unwind at the end of each day. Also, encourage healthy eating habits and regular exercise to keep kids' minds sharp and prevent illness.

10. Keep it positive. Be sure to note improvements and offer praise using specific language. Instead of "Good job," try "I like how you sat down immediately and got to work." Expect that not all days will be easy. "Homework, like any constructive activity, involves moments of frustration, discouragement and anxiety. If you begin with some appreciation of your child's frustration and discouragement, you will be better able to put in place a structure that helps him learn to work through his frustration -- to develop increments of frustration tolerance and self-discipline," Kenneth Barish, Ph.D.

11. Build in choice and breaks. Choice can be incorporated into both the order in which the child agrees to complete assignments and the schedule they will follow to get the work done. Building in choice not only helps motivate children but can also reduce power struggles between parents and children. Some children prefer to take breaks at specific time intervals (every 20 minutes, say), while others do better when the breaks occur after they finish an activity. Be sure to discuss with your child the schedule for breaks and how long the breaks will last.

Adapted from: www.familyeducation.com, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kenneth-barish-phd/how-to-avoid-battles-over-homework_b_3968048.html, and http://www.nasponline.org/resources/home_school/homework.aspx