

# Overcoming the Homework Hurdle

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Despite mixed research on homework effects, many teachers believe that assigning homework offers other benefits besides contributing to school achievement. Homework teaches children how to take responsibility for tasks and how to work independently. That is, homework helps children develop *habits of mind* that will serve them well as they proceed through school and, indeed, through life. Specifically, homework helps children learn how to plan and organize tasks, manage time, make choices, and problem solve, all skills that contribute to effective functioning in the adult world of work and families.

## ***Reasonable Homework Expectations***

It is generally agreed that the younger the child, the less time the child should be expected to devote to homework. A general rule of thumb is that children do 10 minutes of homework for each grade level. Therefore, first graders should be expected to do about 10 minutes of homework, second graders 20 minutes, third graders 30 minutes, and so on. If your child is spending more than 10 minutes per grade level on work at night, then you may want to talk with your child's teacher about adjusting the workload.

## ***Strategies to Make Homework Go More Smoothly***

There are two key strategies parents can draw on to reduce homework hassles. The first is to establish clear routines around homework, including when and where homework gets done and setting up daily schedules for homework. The second is to build in rewards or incentives to use with children for whom "good grades" is not a sufficient reward for doing homework.

## ***Homework Routines***

Tasks are easiest to accomplish when tied to specific routines. By establishing daily routines for homework completion, you will not only make homework go more smoothly, but you will also be fostering a sense of order your child can apply to later life, including college and work.

*Step 1. Find a location in the house where homework will be done.* The right location will depend on your child and the culture of your family. Some children do best at a desk in their bedroom. It is a quiet location, away from the hubbub of family noise. Other children become too distracted by the things they keep in their bedroom and do better at a place removed from those distractions, like the dining room table. Some children need to work by themselves. Others need to have parents nearby to help keep them on task and to answer questions when problems arise. Ask your child where the best place is to work. Both you and your child need to discuss pros and cons of different settings to arrive at a mutually agreed upon location.

*Step 2. Set up a homework center.* Once you and your child have identified a location, fix it up as a home office/homework center. Make sure there is a clear workspace large enough to set out all the materials necessary for completing assignments. Outfit the homework center with the kinds of supplies your child is most likely to need such as pencils, pens, rulers, a calculator, and, depending on the age and needs of your child, a computer or laptop. If possible, the homework center should include a bulletin board that can hold a monthly calendar on which your child can keep track of long-term assignments.

*Step 3. Establish a homework time.* Your child should get in the habit of doing homework at the same time every day. The time may vary depending on the individual child. Some children need a break right after school to get some exercise and have a snack. Others need to start homework while they are still in a school mode (i.e., right after school when there is still some momentum left from getting through the day). In general, it may be best to get homework done either before dinner or as early in the evening as the child can tolerate. The later it gets, the more tired the child becomes and the more slowly the homework gets done.

*Step 4. Establish a daily homework schedule.* In general, at least into middle school, the homework session should begin with your sitting down with your child and drawing up a homework schedule. You should review all the assignments and make sure your child understands them and has all the necessary materials. Ask your child to estimate how long it will take to complete each assignment. Then ask when each assignment will get started. If your child needs help with any assignment, then this should be determined at the beginning so that the start times can take into account parent availability.

For a sample homework schedule you can use with your child, see the Homework Planner document on my homepage.