

# 5 Easy Steps to End Homework Battles

Adapted from an article written by Katie Basson.

Ask parents what their biggest school year challenge is, and you'll likely hear that it is the difficulty they face in getting their kids to do homework. With so many other attractive ways for kids to spend their time, getting them to buckle down and complete that extra bit of schoolwork can be like pulling teeth. As with any chore, though, there are strategies you can use to get it done and make it more fun.



## 1. Make Time for Homework

Fitness gurus have known this for years: you are more likely to stick to an exercise regimen if you do it at the same time everyday and make it an inviolable part of your schedule. The same goes for homework. Don't leave it up in the air as to when homework will be completed. This only ensures that it won't get completed until you have an extended argument with your child about it—usually one hour after bedtime. Instead, sit down with your child and review your family schedule for the upcoming semester. Decide where homework will fit in your daily schedule and make it non-negotiable. It is always helpful to anchor homework time to some other regular activity. Good choices are: directly after school or right before or after dinner. (Scheduling homework in the hour before bedtime is usually not a good practice since your child may be too sleepy to do a good job.)

It is also important to dedicate a set amount of time for homework. This will discourage students from rushing through homework so that they can watch the latest Disney video. What is a reasonable amount of time to spend on homework? That varies with age. Check with your child's teacher. It is generally accepted, though, that First and Second graders should spend about a half hour on homework each night while Third and Fourth graders might need to spend as much as an hour per night.

## 2. Don't Accept No for an Answer

A common refrain from students is "I finished my homework in school" or "The teacher didn't assign us any homework today." It should not matter that they don't have a specific assignment. Homework is an extension of the learning that occurred that day in school, and what they learned that day can be extended in any number of ways. Students can read silently during their allotted homework time, they can look up information in an encyclopedia to enhance what they are learning in Science or Social Studies, or they can look at flashcards, practice math facts, and test their spelling. This is how to teach your child to be a self-directed learner. You will be giving them a gift to get them in the habit of doing this

now. When they are in high school, having this extra study habit will bring them academic success. Be careful that you do not engage in an argument with your child about homework. Give expectations in a matter-of-fact manner, remain calm, consistent and supportive, but do not hover!

### **3. Establish a Partnership with Teachers**

Early in the school year make an effort to get to know your child's teacher. Make an appointment to talk with the teacher if you feel that you are unsure of the classroom routines, assignments or expectations within the first few weeks of school. In doing so, you can express your desire to be a good partner in your child's education. She will appreciate it, and you will be one step closer to a smooth school year. Find out what her homework policy is so that you know what to expect. It is also helpful to know how high her standards are, so that you can ensure that your child's homework is acceptable. Many schools run through classroom policies, routines and expectations with parents at orientation meetings before school starts. Don't miss that if your school provides that opportunity.

### **4. Provide the Right Environment**

Most people's advice on homework is to set up a desk in your child's room and make sure that they have a quiet and distraction-free work environment. This sounds very reasonable, but few people seem to be able to follow this advice. I know many students who instead do their homework on the living room floor, at the kitchen counter, or at the dining room table. It seems that some people work best when they aren't isolated from household activity. If that is the case with your child, then provide a small traveling office for him so that he has all of the necessary items at hand and won't waste time running around the house looking for a sharp pencil. With all the supplies nearby, and distractions limited to the general background noise of family living, your student ought to be able to concentrate on homework.

### **5. Set a Good Example**

"Do as I say not as I do" is no longer considered appropriate parental advice. In order to instill the proper values in our children, we must model them. If we expect our children to be conscientious, hard-working students, then that is what they must see in us. Make an effort to show your child your work ethic by reading trade magazines and business books while they do their homework. Take out a pencil and write notes as you read. Investigate ideas fully. If you read something interesting in the newspaper, look up information about it on the Internet. Always be eager to learn something new. Sign up for an adult education class, teach yourself to knit, or write that novel you've always thought about! Go back to school yourself! What better example to give your child! The more that we can show our children that learning is a lifelong adventure that requires their involvement, the more likely it is that

homework will cease being a chore and start being an integral part of a life well-lived. Education should be looked upon as opportunity and a privilege.

If you take the time to set up these parameters around homework, you'll find that you waste less energy arguing over homework and making up for lost assignments. Soon your child will build independence and initiation in the homework process. You'll have more time and energy for other pursuits, and so will your child. What's more, you'll discover that the benefits of hassle free homework add up to more than just scheduling efficiency, they equal a better education.