

Beating the Homework Battle

Homework in itself can be a controversial issue. Many education professionals are sceptical about how effective homework is in supporting a child's learning, especially at primary school level. Yet most parents are keen that their child should receive homework, not least because it keeps parents in touch with what is happening at school and how their child is doing. Schools have many different approaches to homework too - some send weekly spellings, tables and other activities, whereas other may set homework fortnightly or may provide a piece of project work.

Whatever approach your child's school takes, it is important to realise that studies in Britain have shown that children who are supported with homework by their families are more likely to perform better in exams at age 16 than those who are not. This is likely to be less to do with the homework they are actually doing, and more to do with what they are learning from you about the importance of education and a positive approach to learning.

So how can parents effectively support their children with homework? These tips may be helpful.

- Show an interest in what your child is doing. By showing an interest you are communicating that you think school work is important and should be taken seriously. Check what needs to be done and look at their work afterwards, praising and making positive suggestions.
- Set up a regular study time. For younger children with less homework, this could be a regular reading time before bed plus an hour at the weekend; for older children you may need to help them set a more regular schedule. Check with your child's school about the amount of time they should be spending each evening/weekend on homework, then talk to your child about the best time to complete work. When do they feel most alert? When is the house likely to be calmer and more quiet? Talk also about the risks of leaving everything to the last minute. Some children (and adults!) work better like this, but it can have its pitfalls.
- Provide your child with a calm, quiet space to complete work. If your child is easily distracted, you may wish to make this a public space within your house rather than their bedroom. Don't let your child be distracted by TVs, phones or other devices.
- Provide whatever equipment your child may need to complete their work. At primary school level this is likely to be paper, a pencil, ruler and perhaps also a rubber. They may also need some coloured pencils. Sometimes your child may need to conduct research. They can use the Internet or they could try the local library, which will have lots of topic-based books and staff who can give advice.
- Make completion of homework part of the household routine. If you have written work to complete too, try sitting down with your child and working alongside one another. This also teaches them that the requirement to complete tasks does not go away once we are grownups!
- Be quietly supportive as your child completes homework, but don't do it for them. Not only is this not supporting their learning, it also gives them the message that you can do it better because they are not good enough. Whilst it is reasonable to sit with your seven-year-old whilst they complete their work, your involvement should gradually decrease as they become older and more independent, depending on their needs.
- Encourage daily reading right from the start. Studies have shown that reading with your child at home is the most effective way in which you can influence their attainment at school.

- Express high expectations for your child from an early age, in terms of their approach to learning and the effort they put in. They will most likely take their lead on amount, quality, effort and enjoyment from the expectations you have of them.
- Ask your child to explain their work to you. What have they been learning, and what strategies have they been taught? Ask them to explain it to you as if they were the teacher and you were the pupil. This is a really powerful way of helping children understand what they have learnt. They may be learning different approaches at school to the ones you learnt as a child (particularly in maths), so your inexperience with these methods means they'll need to explain clearly to you as a novice learner! Try to avoid the temptation to teach your method to them until they're confident with the method they've been taught at school.
- Encourage regular breaks, during which your child has a 5 minute walk around, perhaps a quick drink or a healthy snack.
- Break tasks up if this is how your child works better. For example, learn three spellings now, then three more this afternoon and the rest tomorrow.
- Encourage your child to be organised, and to know what homework they have and when it is due to be handed in. Help them to make this organisation into a habit. From Key Stage 2 (Year 3) and up, most schools provide a homework diary for children to record what they have to do. Many schools also publish homework details on their websites.
- Let your child face the consequences if homework is not handed in on time. This is increasingly important as they approach secondary school age.
- Praise your child for homework completed. Try to praise the effort your child put in rather than the outcome. Use this approach also when asking about the results of spellings and tables tests – look for how your child is improving and whether they are able to learn from mistakes made. If your child can see the progress she or he is making, they're much more likely to make further efforts in their work.

Unfortunately, homework can still become a battleground. Children may be reluctant to complete work because they found it difficult in class or because they are tired or want to do something else. Parents may be tired after a hard working week, and may struggle to support their children, particularly as teaching methods have changed so much since they were at school. Some parents have to fight the urge to do the work for their child. What should be a pleasant, calm but important activity can become tense and fraught with anxiety, and this can then become a pattern of behaviour which is repeated every weekend. Here are some ideas which may help to alleviate some of the homework stress:

- Talk to your child. Why are they so reluctant to complete their work? Try to get to the root cause so that you can address it directly.
- Talk to your child's teacher. You may be able to find out if your child has found this work challenging in class, or ask for tips on how to support them.
- Keep calm! This is easier said than done when your child is flat-out refusing to do their work, but you don't want to create a vicious circle of stress and anger around homework.
- Let your child face the consequences of not completing work. Whatever the consequence is at school, let your child face this. If you have a special trip or activity planned at the weekend, explain that homework must come first and if it is not completed, the activity won't go ahead.

- Limit screen time if homework is not completed. Your child needs to see that their schoolwork and education are a priority.
- If you feel your child's homework is taking up too much time, is too hard for them to complete, or is causing genuine distress, you must seek help from the school. Homework is only useful if it can be completed independently, with perhaps some gentle support from you, and in a reasonable timeframe. Let the school know if this is a problem for you.
- 'Growth Mindset' theory offers many good ideas for how to communicate positively with your child about their effort and attainment at school. If you're interested to learn more, see the Twinkl ['Parents' Guide to Growth Mindset Theory'](#).