

Homework Help: Laying the Foundation

One of the crucial parent-school partnerships is in the area of homework. Begin by helping your child develop self-discipline. Self-discipline is the ability to stay on-task despite temptations or distractions and the ability to complete unpleasant short-term tasks to achieve long-term goals.

New studies show that a lack of self-discipline is a major reason for student underachievement. In fact the research shows that self-discipline is a better predictor than IQ of academic performance and which students will improve their grades during the school year.¹ Homework time is a daily opportunity to help your child learn self-discipline and independence.

First, help your child set goals and create a plan. Break the big, long-term goals into smaller goals. When students gain experience consistently reaching smaller goals, they are more likely to meet long-term goals. Next, schedule the activities young students will need to do to fulfill their goals; engage older students in planning their daily routine. Include a set homework time and bed time that are consistent each day. Allow your child to schedule in things they enjoy. Students who incorporate activities they enjoy (time with friends, a favorite sport, etc) into their schedule are more likely to stick to their plan.² Help your child limit their activities to avoid becoming over-extended. Give your child a set time to relax before starting homework if they come home directly from school. Some kids may also need a snack time to refuel. Then, help your child plan for distractions. How will they deal with both external (my friend is texting me) and internal (I just can't focus) distractions?³ Ask, "What things are most likely to distract you? What will you do about it?" Some ideas are:

- Close my eyes and count to 10 (it is simple but actually helps refocus)
- Turn off my IM, Skype, phone, and other possible electronic interruptions.
- Move or put away distracters like the TV, siblings, or games.
- Take a two-minute brain break to look out the window, get a drink, exercise, etc.

Then prepare a consistent space⁴ for homework. It should be a place where your child can keep all their school supplies and work.⁵ Many children waste a lot of time organizing their things and going from room to room looking for supplies. Choose a space as free of visible and audible distractions as possible. When you can see the temptation it is much harder to resist it.⁶ Many children appear to be on-task (at their desk, books open) when they are really listening to the tv, watching a sibling play, or stopping every few seconds to reply to text messages. To help cut down on distractions and show your commitment to learning, set a daily family quiet time.⁷ During this time everyone in the family does something quiet and learning-related. Adults can read or engage in their own work. The key is that everyone has quiet time even if they have no homework. Children without homework can read, write letters, study for upcoming tests, work on long-term projects, or learn about topics that interest them. Because everyone is involved in quiet time, children with homework can concentrate, don't get distracted by siblings at play, and are less likely to try to avoid doing their homework. Preparing a proper study space and laying a strong foundation of routine and expectations will help your child be able to focus, work more efficiently, and get more out of their homework time.

The next newsletter will look at what you and your child can do during homework time to learn more productively.

1. *Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents* <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/PsychologicalScienceDec2005>.

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IN THE BIBLE

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. *2 Peter 1:5-7*

Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.
Proverbs 16:32

IN NATURE

Homework is really an opportunity for students to practice skills they are learning. Animal youngsters have homework too. For example, Caledonian crows have learned to use sticks to get grubs from inside logs and trees. But this is a learned behavior. Babies have to learn to use sticks so they go to “crow school”. They watch the adult crows in their family catch grubs. They hold the adult’s tools. They try, they watch, they try, and watch, again and again and again. It takes about a year of practice for them to learn to use a stick properly and actually get grubs with it. Find out more from the BBC http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_9125000/9125227.stm and watch their video at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00bt2kq>. Find out more about animals that practice to learn new things, or teach a family pet to do a new trick.

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- 2-3. *Goal Conflicts and Self-regulation: A New Look at Pupils’ Off-task Behaviour in the Classroom* by Manfred Hofer <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1747938X07000036>
4. *How to Help: Show That You Think Education and Homework Are Important — Helping Your Child With Homework* <http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/part5.html>
5. *Teaching Study Skills*, adapted from work by Virginia Smith Harvey <http://www.teachersandfamilies.com/open/parent/homework2.cfm>
6. *Hot/Cool-System Analysis of Delay of Gratification: Dynamics of Willpower*, by Janet Metcalfe and Walter Mischel, *Psychological Review*, 1999, Vol 106, No 1, 3-19 doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.106.1.3
7. *Helping your Child with Homework* by Heidi Liss Radunovich <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy866>

LEARN MORE ONLINE

- Helping your Child with Homework <http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/index.html>
- How to Help with Homework http://www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/helping_homework.html
- Homework Help <http://www.cnn.com/2011/08/30/living/help-kids-homework-p/index.html>
- Helping with Homework <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy866>

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