



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Family **FACTS** on Education

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Making the Most of Homework



How can families help their children with homework?

Parents play a vital role in their children's education, and helping with homework is an important part of that role. This issue of *Family FACTS* describes steps families can take at home to support their children's studying and homework. There are tips on how to create a positive learning environment at home where good study habits are developed and encouraged. With your help your children can develop vital skills and confidence to face challenges in the classroom today and throughout their lives.

Research over many years has proven the point: Children succeed in learning when their families actively support them. Helping with homework is an important way to be directly involved in your child's education. Your interest and support send powerful messages that education is a high priority in your family and that you are there to support your child's efforts.

Why Homework?

Homework is important for everyone:

Homework gives students...

- Valuable guided opportunities to apply the lessons learned that day in class.
- Practice working with basic academic skills already learned, such as reading, writing, spelling and math.
- Opportunities to establish good study and work habits that will last a lifetime.

Homework gives teachers...

- Feedback on how well students have grasped the daily lesson.
- Important data about how well a student remembers concepts or ideas that were taught previously.

Homework gives parents...

- Opportunities to observe their children's progress.
- A useful tool for keeping in touch with teachers.

How much homework?

It's a good idea to ask the teacher at the beginning of the year how much time students should be spending on homework. The National PTA and the National Education Association suggest that:

- In kindergarten through second grade, children can benefit from 10 to 20 minutes each school day.
- In third through sixth grades, children can benefit from 30 to 60 minutes a school day.
- In seventh through ninth grades and in high school, students benefit from spending more time on homework. The amount may vary from night to night. Research has shown that, as students progress through school, homework and the amount of time engaged in homework increases in importance.
- In addition to the specific homework assignment, consider adding a daily period of 10 to 45 minutes of free-choice reading.

Of course, the right amount of homework also depends on the individual child. Children who have problems focusing, write slowly, have other special needs, or who are just learning English may need more time for homework. If you are concerned about the time your child spends on homework, keep track of how long it really takes your child and share this data with the teacher. Ask the teacher for suggestions on how to help.

How can parents help?

According to the United States Department of Education, parents help their children with homework in a variety of ways. These suggestions can help you establish general homework and studying guidelines. All children and families are unique. Adjust these ideas to meet your and your children's needs, and you'll be on your way to helping your children improve their academic experience and performance.

- **Set a Regular Homework Time.** Work with your child to make a schedule. Post the schedule where you'll see it often. During homework time, turn off the TV and computer games and minimize loud distractions. Make it a quiet time for the entire family.
- **Set up a Study Spot.** Help your child pick a quiet, comfortable place to do homework. Your child will need a desk or table surface, a comfortable chair, good lighting, and supplies. It can be anywhere in your home. You don't need a special room. If possible, make it a permanent area where books and papers can be left.
- **Make a Homework Survival Kit.** Include pencils, pens, erasers, writing paper, a dictionary, a calculator, and other things your child might need to complete assignments. File folders can help kids keep organized. Keep this kit in the study spot so it is always on hand when needed.
- **Be Available.** You don't need to be an expert in a subject to help your child. Parent support is what is needed — remember that it's your children's homework, not yours! Make sure the structure and timelines you and your child set up are followed. Ask about daily assignments, look over completed assignments, and check for neatness and thoroughness.
- **Praise your Children for Effort.** More and more, research is showing that talent and ability grow with effort and hard work. Praise your children for their hard work on

homework, and for sticking with tough problems. Point out progress as their skills develop.

- **Follow-up.** Ask to see your children's homework after the teacher has checked it and made comments or corrections. Go over it with your child.
- **Ask the Teacher.** If your child struggles with homework, let the teacher know and ask for guidance on how to help. The most important thing for you to do is to keep open the lines of communication with your children and their teachers and to communicate regularly.

A supportive home environment helps establish study and productivity as part of daily life. Organizing and running your home with your child's developing skills in mind creates the structure and atmosphere children need to excel in the classroom. The benefits will last a lifetime!

Sources/Resources on Helping with Homework

Helping Your Child with Homework. US Department of Education. Families can explore this website to find a variety of information about homework and how to help. www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/index.html

Parental Involvement in Homework: A Review of Current Research and Its Implications for Teachers, After School Program Staff and Parent Leaders. (2004) Harvard Family Research Project. This resource will help families understand why teachers assign their students homework. www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/parental-involvement-in-homework-a-review-of-current-research-and-its-implications-for-teachers-after-school-program-staff-and-parent-leaders

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Colvin, Geoffrey. October 19, 2006. *What it takes to be great.* Fortune. Research showing that the lack of natural talent is not as important to great success as is demanding practice and hard work.



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