Getting the most out of homework time

The value of good study habits extends well beyond the walls of the classroom: Encouraging your child to do homework can help him/her develop interests, reinforce positive habits and encourage a lifelong love of learning new things.



Teaching your child that learning is an exciting process begins with your own outlook and attitude. By getting involved with your child's study habits, and spending time together, you can show that learning can be both fun and important. While this may seem like a difficult task, with careful planning you can help your child make the grade both at school and at home.

Below are some homework tips to help encourage your child's love of learning throughout and beyond the new school year:

Choose a time of day for homework. Think about your child's nature. Does he/she have too much pent up energy after school? Is he/she sluggish after mealtime? If you can find the right time of day for your child, he/she will respond better and be more productive.

Make it daily routine. Encourage "homework time" each and every day. The earlier children get into the habit of study time—even if it's only for a short period—the easier it will be for them to adjust when the homework load gets heavier.

Determine your child's style of learning. Does your child learn best when he/she can visualize a concept through pictures or images or when they listen to someone? Or, perhaps he/she is a tactile learner and prefers to "practice" or "do" what they are studying.

Create a workstation. Find a place with lots of light that suits your child's style of learning and where your child can study comfortably. A desk or even the kitchen table will do. Keep children away from the TV during scheduled homework times.

Help your child get organized. Have the right tools available and easily accessible. Paper, books, pencils, binders, planners/calendars, calculators and other tools are a requirement for good study habits.

Go over homework together. Paying close attention to homework will not only help identify any potential difficulties, but also lets your child know that you're interested in them and what they're doing. Offer to check the homework once it's completed. If your child needs help, offer to pitch in, but remember that it is your child's homework and they are responsible for completing it.

Give kids a break! When the going gets too tough, let children take a short "time out" to shake off any frustration and regain their focus. Offer praise. Consistent and specific praise positively reaffirms solid study habits and builds confidence.

Stay involved. Talk to children about what they're studying at school and encourage them to let the teacher and you know when they don't understand a new topic or idea. Ask kids questions to determine whether or not they really "get" something.

Monitor assignments. Stay in the "know" when it comes to your child's homework including how long assignments should take and when they are completed. Many school boards now offer a detailed curriculum description online so that you can keep track of key learning objectives. You can help your child set up a calendar of school projects and mark each one off as it is completed. This will help both of you keep on track and avoid any hasty late night projects.

In addition to good study habits, there are many other ways that you can encourage your child to enjoy learning:

Encourage reading. Read aloud to your child and encourage them to read to you. Storytelling is not only the basis for reading and writing, it helps develop memory skills and encourages the imagination.

Incorporate learning into everyday life. Whether you count shopping cart items at the store, look for interesting shapes in a room, “eye spy” for colors or sing number songs in the car—learning can be part of anything and everything you do with your child.

Give older children the chance to help out and feel a part of the action. Have them: write out your grocery list, map out directions for a journey, measure ingredients for dinner, address a letter or post messages for other family members.

Be a role model. Children often copy adult behaviour. Engage in quieter, similar activities while kids do homework. If they have a reading assignment, pick up a book and read. Support study of a big math test, by going over your chequebook. These "parallel" actions set an example and help kids feel less like they’re the only ones that have to do work. They also demonstrate why learning can be a family matter and should be a lifelong undertaking.

Turning homework time into an enjoyable experience will help children realize that they can have intellectual fun, be excited by new ideas and be challenged to acquire new knowledge. Parents who take an active role in their child’s study habits can help them to reach their potential through education and learning opportunities.