



## Positive Parenting of Primary Schoolers

# Homework

*Children are usually expected to spend some time out of school hours doing homework and study.*

*Expectations vary between different schools and teachers so it is important for parents to talk with teachers and find out what is expected of their child. Parents have an important role in helping their child develop good study habits and routines. Homework time should not be a time of stress or pressure. It should be a pleasant time where parents can provide encouragement and offer help if their child needs it. This tip sheet gives some suggestions on how to help your child develop a good homework routine.*

Children differ widely in their abilities and how quickly they come to understand new ideas. However, by providing children with encouragement, support and help, they are more likely to work to the best of their abilities.

## Why Do Homework Problems Occur?

Homework problems can arise because of poor planning such as leaving things to the last minute. For example, some children make it hard on themselves by starting a large project the night before it is due.

Some children have difficulties with homework because they do not understand the work. Some avoid homework, or do homework quickly with little care, because they would rather be doing something else. Parents may feel their child does not have a good attitude towards study or believe their child is lazy or irresponsible. This may make the problem worse.

## How To Prepare Your Child for Homework

### **Encourage Your Child to Relax After School**

Children need time to relax after school, just as adults do after work. Your child may also be hungry. Offer them an afternoon snack and let them tell you about their day.

### **Ask Your Child about Their Homework**

Find out what your child needs to do for homework and when it needs to be completed. It might involve tasks such as using a ruler, counting or sorting things, learning spelling words, writing a sentence or two, working on a project or doing a few mathematics problems. Your child may have some free days if they complete all their homework tasks early in the week.

### **Set a Time for Doing Homework**

Set a regular time for homework that fits with your family's schedule. You may need to fit it in around your work and



your child's other commitments such as sport, clubs, music or art lessons. However, remember that it is important to get into a good study routine and homework should have a high priority.

A good time for doing homework is immediately after children have had time to relax but before they are allowed to play or watch television. If other children come around to play, you may like to ask them to come back when your child has finished their homework. Remind your child of the ground rules—*Molly, when your homework is finished you can play or watch television.*

## Arrange a Place to Do Homework

It is okay for children to do their homework in the family living area rather than in their bedroom if they want to. However, it is best to set up a good study environment:

- Clear a space at a table.
- Make sure the room is well lit.
- Reduce distractions (although children do not need absolute quiet to work).

## How To Promote Good Homework Habits

### **Help Your Child Get Started**

Prompt your child to get their work out and get started on the first task. Be prepared to sit at the table with your child but do not do their homework for them.

### **Praise Your Child**

Praise can help motivate your child to persist with their homework—*Great. That's five questions you've done already.*

## ***Wait Until Your Child Asks for Help***

Give your child a chance to do the work on their own before helping them.

## ***Help Your Child Solve Problems for Themselves***

Prompt your child to solve problems themselves rather than giving the answer straight away. For example, if your child asks how to spell the word 'garden' without trying to spell it first, you could say—*How do you think you spell it? Get out a piece of paper and try to spell it yourself first. I'll come and have a look.* Offer praise when your child attempts the word. If they get the word right, offer further praise. If the word is wrong, rather than saying—*No, that's wrong*—point out the letters that are correct first—*Michael, that's nearly right. The first four letters are right. Have a look at the ending. Is it 'en' or 'on'? Yes 'en'. Excellent!*

Be careful not to overdo it. If after one prompt your child still cannot get the correct answer, tell them what it is. Children will get frustrated if every question they ask is met with responses such as—*Look it up in the dictionary first.* You will find that your child is more cooperative if help is given freely, with one or two prompts.

## ***Show an Interest in Your Child's Work***

When children are doing their homework, they need encouragement for correct work and for attempting the task rather than criticism for mistakes. Show an interest and praise your child for their efforts.

Some children will ask whether their work is correct or want an opinion on how good the work is. Do not feel that you have to make sure your child's work is perfect before they hand it in. It can be discouraging for your child if they have worked hard on a story only to have you point out all of the spelling or punctuation mistakes. The ideas your child has expressed in their story may be very good. When checking work, say something positive about your child's effort. If you must make corrections, only point out one or two mistakes.

If messy work is a problem, encourage your child to do rough copies of work first and a final neat copy to hand in at school.

## ***Offer a Reward for Finishing Homework***

Praise and reward your child's efforts when they have finished their homework. Suggested rewards include allowing your child to watch television or play before dinner.

## **Key Steps**

- Let your child relax after school.
- Ask your child about their homework.
- Set up a place to do homework and help your child get started.
- Offer praise and encouragement while your child is working.
- Prompt your child to solve problems themselves.
- Check your child's work.
- Say something positive about your child's effort.
- Offer a reward when homework has been completed.

## **If Problems Persist**

Here is another strategy you can try if your child continues to experience difficulties doing their homework.

- Explain to your child that they can earn points each day that they complete their homework without a fuss. Make a list of tasks your child must do, for example, bringing home their homework notebook each day (1 point), starting their homework by 4.15 p.m. without complaining (2 points) and working on their homework without interruption for at least 15 minutes (5 points).
- Tell your child that these points can be exchanged for a daily reward or a larger reward at the end of the week. Decide how many points your child must earn to get the reward and what the reward will be. For example, if your child earns 32 points by the end of the week they might receive some money towards a new game.
- Make a chart to keep a tally of points earned. Stick the chart in a prominent place such as on the refrigerator.
- Each day your child follows the rules, put the points on their chart and praise them.
- At the end of the agreed time, add up the number of points your child has earned. If they have reached the goal, give them the reward.

If problems with homework persist, discuss the problem with your child's teacher. Your child may need extra assistance in one or more subject areas. Remember that children's learning, and how well they do at school, is strongly affected by their motivation as well as their ability. One of the best ways to encourage better motivation is to focus on your child's successes—the things they do right rather than things they do wrong.

***See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.***



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