

Homework Strategies for Parents

School has begun and thousands of students are back in the classroom. At the end of each day or week, teachers will be assigning homework. Homework is very important because it helps students to apply principles they have been taught in the classroom and achieve mastery. It also assists in the development of critical thinking and original thought. More importantly, it develops accountability and responsibility.

When students are given homework, in a real way it involves the parents. It is imperative that parents remember they are their children's primary educators. The teachers can only build on the foundation parents have laid. Generally, parents' interests in their children's education will determine how well they do in school. This is why I titled this article, "Homework Strategies for Parents." I will share parental strategies that can enhance their children's interest in doing homework.

THE PROBLEM

Too many parents are not involved in the children's educational process. They believe that their responsibility ends after purchasing school uniforms, books, and paying school fees. Some say they are too busy and have more important things to do. They do not go to parents' meetings, report card days, sports day, and other school programs. They do not inquire about or get involved in their children's homework assignments. These parents are often most critical if their children behave badly in school or get bad grades.

PARENTAL STRATEGIES

How involved should parents be in helping their children with homework assignments? Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Sit down with your children during the first week of school and find out what subjects they are taking.** Actually open and explore each textbook. Get an idea of the kind of assignments they contain and check for the language difficulty to determine whether your children will need additional explanation to do them.
2. **Write down the names of all the subject and home room teachers, their telephone numbers, and if possible, their email addresses.** Make a get-acquainted call to the home room teacher before the first month of school is completed. For parents of high school children, make sure to call the subject teacher for which the student has the greatest challenge. Tell the teacher that you would like her/him to keep an open line of communication as you both work together in the learning process of your child.
3. **Provide a permanent quiet place to do homework assignments.** Make sure there is very little distraction. Avoid having music, radio, or the television playing loudly in the house while demanding that your child concentrates on her/his homework.
4. **Set time limits.** Do not encourage your children to sit studying or doing homework assignments hours on end without taking a break. It stifles interest and curtails energy needed to complete the task. Instead, let your children take five- to ten minute-breaks every thirty- to forty-five minutes. This will re-energize them and keep their interest up. During the break, they can go outside and walk around, read a newspaper, or listen to favorite music. I do not suggest they turn on the television because they may not turn it off again.

5. **Help your children get organized.** Purchase a book or diary in which they are to write their assignments. As a parent, you should look at the assignment book each day. Then create a daily schedule that will include how your children will utilize all waking hours--from morning 'till bed time. Post the schedules on the wall in your children's bedrooms. Always include some free time in which your children can relax or "chill." This time should not be long--thirty to sixty minutes. In addition, after school responsibilities should include limited rest, household chores, school uniform preparation, and bedtime. This schedule should be created for students from kindergarten to Grade 12. When your children come home each day, do not just ask them: "Do you have any homework today?" Check for yourself. If the answer is "no" today, tomorrow, and the entire week, then you should confirm by looking at their assignment book and other workbooks. In addition, you can call the teacher and ask if any assignments were given. Many children do not tell the truth because they are lazy, and they know that their parents are not really interested and will not check on them. Parents, do not make this mistake.
6. **Set a good example.** Take the opportunity to read a book or newspaper while your children study. This helps to create a learning atmosphere. Once in a while show an interest by asking questions, taking a look at what your children are doing, and offering help if needed or requested.
7. **Stick to the plan.** Find a plan that best suits your children and stick to it. Some children do best doing their homework as soon as they arrive at home. Others prefer to wait an hour or so. Some students go to sleep as soon as they arrive at home and rise an hour later ready to do their work. Whatever is the pattern, it should be understood that homework is the highest on the priority list of daily activities. Do not allow your children to spend three to four hours wasting time and waiting until late at night to do homework assignments. This is unhealthy and often counter productive.
8. **Provide encouragement.** Often praise and encourage your children for sticking to their schedule and completing assignments properly and on time. Encouragement can go a long way in empowering your children to become active learners.

I believe these few strategies will help you arouse interest and create a conducive environment for active learning. Parents remember, your influence and responsibility for your children's education should be greater than that of the classroom teacher. You can make the difference in your children's lives. Do it now. **Barrington Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. You can reach him at 323 8772 or www.soencouragement.org**