

Helping Your Child With Homework

During Secondary School, homework gets more intense and grades start to matter more.

At the same time, teens face a lot of other big changes. They're adjusting to the physical and emotional effects of puberty, while busy social lives and sports commitments gain importance, and many also take part-time jobs.

Parents can play a crucial role in helping teens handle these challenges and succeed in school by lending a little help, support, and guidance, and by knowing what problems demand their involvement and which ones require them to hang back.

Setting Up Shop

Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit, distraction-free place to study. The space should be stocked with paper, pencils, a calculator, dictionary, thesaurus, and any other necessary supplies. It should be away from distractions like TVs, ringing phones, and video games.

Your child may prefer to retreat to a private space to work rather than study surrounded by parents and siblings. Grant that independence, but check in from time to time to make sure that your teen hasn't gotten distracted.

If your child needs a computer for assignments, try to set it up in a common space, not in a bedroom, to discourage playing video games, chatting with or emailing friends, or surfing the Internet for fun during study time. Also consider parental controls, available through your Internet service provider (ISP), and software that blocks and filters any inappropriate material.

Find out which sites teachers are recommending and bookmark them for easy access. These should be communicated home in the organiser or on a homework sheet itself. Teach your child how to look for reliable sources of information and double-check any that look questionable.

A Parent's Supporting Role

When it comes to homework, be there to offer support and guidance, answer questions, help interpret assignment instructions, and review the completed work. But resist the urge to provide the right answers or complete assignments.

It can be difficult to see your child stressed out over homework, especially when there's a test or important deadline looming. But you can help by teaching them the problem-solving skills they need to get through their assignments and offering encouragement as they do.

More tips to help make homework easier for your child:

- **Plan ahead.** Regularly sit down with your child to go over class loads and make sure they're balanced. If your child has a particularly big workload from classes, you may want to see if you can shuffle the daily schedule so that there's a study opportunity during the day or limit after-school activities. Form Teachers or Heads of Department will have some perspective on which classes are going to require more or less work.
- **Establish a routine.** Send the message that schoolwork is a top priority with ground rules like setting a regular time and place each day for homework to be done. And make it clear that there's no TV, phone calls, video game-playing, etc., until homework is done and checked.
- **Instill organization skills.** No one is born with great organizational skills — they're learned and practiced over time. Most children first encounter multiple teachers and classrooms in middle school, when organization becomes a key to succeeding. Give your child a calendar or use the organiser to help get organized.

- **Apply school to the "real world."** Talk about how what your child learns now applies outside the classroom, such as the importance of meeting deadlines — as they'll also have to do in the workplace — or how topics in history class relate to what's happening in today's news.

Homework Problems

Especially at KS4, homework can really start to add up and become harder to manage. These strategies can help:

- **Be there.** You don't have to hover at homework time, but be around in case you're needed. If your son is frazzled by geometry problems he's been trying to solve for hours, for instance, suggest he take a break. A fresh mind may be all he needed, but when it's time to return to homework, ask how you can help.
- **Be in touch with school.** Maintain contact with your child's Form teacher and Subject Teachers throughout the school year to stay informed, especially if your child is struggling. They'll keep you apprised of what's going on at school and how to help your child. They can guide you to tutoring options, offer perspective on course load, and provide guidance on any issues, such as dyslexia, ADHD, or vision or hearing difficulties. You can also be kept in the loop about tests, quizzes, and projects.
- **Don't forget the study skills.** Help your child develop good study skills — both in class and on homework. No one is born knowing how to study and often those skills aren't stressed in the classroom. When you're helping your teen study for a test, for instance, suggest such strategies as using flashcards to memorize facts or taking notes and underlining while reading.
- **Encourage students to reach out.** Most teachers are available for extra help before or after school, and also might be able to recommend other resources. Encourage your child to ask for help, if needed, but remember that in school students are rewarded for knowing the right answers, and no one likes to stand out by saying that they don't have them. Praise your child's hard work and effort, and ask the Form Teacher or Subject Teachers for resources for support if you need them.

Don't wait for communications from school to find out that there are problems at school. The sooner you intervene, the sooner you can help your teen get back on track.

Learning for Life

Make sure your child knows that you're available if there's a snag, but that it's important to work independently. Encourage effort and determination — not just good grades. Doing so is crucial to motivating your kids to succeed in school and in life.

With a little support from parents, homework can be a positive experience for pupils and foster lifelong skills they'll need to succeed in school and beyond.

Top 10 Homework Tips

Pupils are more successful in school when parents take an active interest in their homework — it shows pupils that what they do is important.

Of course, helping with homework shouldn't mean spending hours hunched over a desk. Parents can be supportive by demonstrating study and organization skills, explaining a tricky problem, or just encouraging your child to take a break. And who knows? Parents might even learn a thing or two!

Here are some tips to guide the way:

1. **Know the teachers — and what they're looking for.** Attend school events, such as Academic progress Evenings, to meet your child's teachers. Ask about their homework and how you should be involved.
2. **Set up a homework-friendly area.** Make sure your child have a well-lit place to complete homework. Keep supplies — paper, pencils, glue, scissors — within reach.
3. **Schedule a regular study time.** Some children work best in the afternoon, following a snack and play period; others may prefer to wait until after dinner.
4. **Help them make a plan.** On heavy homework nights or when there's an especially hefty assignment to tackle, encourage your child break up the work into manageable chunks. Create a work schedule for the night if necessary — and take time for a 15-minute break every hour, if possible.
5. **Keep distractions to a minimum.** This means no TV, loud music, or phone calls. (Occasionally, though, a phone call to a classmate about an assignment can be helpful.)
6. **Make sure your child does their own work.** They won't learn if they don't think for themselves and make their own mistakes. Parents can make suggestions and help with directions. But it's a child's job to do the learning.
7. **Be a motivator and monitor.** Ask about assignments, quizzes, and tests. Give encouragement, check completed homework, and make yourself available for questions and concerns.
8. **Set a good example.** Does your child ever see you diligently balancing your budget or reading a book? Your child is more likely to follow your examples than your advice.
9. **Praise their work and efforts.** Post a homework, assessment or art project on the refrigerator. Mention academic achievements to relatives.
10. **If there are continuing problems with homework, get help.** Talk about it with your child's teacher. Some children have trouble seeing the board and may need glasses; others might need an evaluation for a learning problem or attention disorder.