

Study Skills

A Handout for Parents

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Overview

Many capable children at all grade levels experience frustration and failure in school, not because they lack ability, but because they do not have adequate *study skills*. Good study habits are important for success in school, to foster feelings of competence, to develop positive attitudes, and to help children realize they can control how well they do in school and in life. Good study habits lay the groundwork for successful work habits as an adult.

For children to learn good study skills, teachers and parents must work together. It is most important to help children build good habits, to develop a system that works for an individual child, and to use the system effectively and consistently. Preferred learning styles vary from child to child. Children need to discover how they learn and then work out a study system that fits best. Parents of elementary aged children usually help their children more than parents of adolescents. However, adolescents also need parental support and encouragement throughout high school.

Four Basic Principles to Enhance Study Skills

1. Make homework completion a positive experience: associate it with love and affection, freedom, fun and control.
2. Make homework completion a high priority.
3. Use homework completion to teach organization skills and improve learning skills. Remember that the primary purpose of homework is to improve learning and foster work habits.
4. Provide and enforce logical and meaningful consequences.

Make Homework Completion a Positive Experience

Associate it with love and affection, freedom, fun, and control. Possible ways to do this are to:

- Provide support and praise for homework completion.
- Be available to provide non-critical assistance.
- Give children choice in when, where, and how they complete homework assignments.
- Encourage your children to complete homework well enough that they have a sense of control over their own learning and levels of competence.

- Maintain a positive and helpful attitude: avoid criticism and anger.
- Help children understand what types of homework they enjoy and encourage them to choose assignments accordingly. Some prefer written reports, others prefer hands-on projects.
- Use homework preferences in developing a homework schedule. Some children prefer to get disliked homework done first, while others prefer to do their easier work first.
- When a child dislikes subject, find ways to make it less frustrating. For example, set a goal of doing five math problems and then taking a stretch.
- Encourage your children to participate in study groups with friends. Research shows that children who form study groups achieve at a much higher level than children who always study alone.
- Encourage your child to have fun such as eating a snack, calling friends, starting an activity, or watching a favorite show when homework is finished.
- Never use homework as a punishment.
- Be a good listener, and encourage your child to ask questions about things that are hard to understand.
- Set aside time for your children to share with you the skills and information they are acquiring.
- Help children study for tests by quizzing them on the material in a friendly manner.
- Have your children imagine themselves as excellent students. Then brainstorm what needs to be done to make that a reality.

Make Homework Completion a High Priority

- Make clear that you expect your children to complete homework well.
- Establish a study routine: children should be in the habit of studying at the same time and in the same place each day. Children and parents should decide, together, upon the study routine by taking into account scheduled activities, family commitments, and favorite TV shows. Also, consider the child's ability to concentrate at different times of the day. Many elementary school children are too tired after dinner, and show this by having trouble concentrating, being easily frustrated, and being slow to complete tasks. Ideally, the family agrees upon a study hour, the television and stereo are off, phone calls are not taken, and the entire family studies, reads, or completes paperwork.
- Establish a place to study with good lighting and a table or desk. Some children prefer to study in their own room. Others do better if they are studying at the kitchen table or other location near parental help. Some children are able to study with a little background noise such as music. Few can study effectively in front of the TV and most need uninterrupted quiet. Other children may prefer to work at the library, and will need transportation.

- Have supplies on hand including binders, notebooks, paper, pencils, pens, assignment books, erasers, dictionaries, a calculator, ruler, hole punch, tape, glue, reference books and/or programs.
- Demonstrate, and enforce, that homework completion is a higher priority than other activities. A child should not watch TV and talk with friends before completing homework, unless time later in the day has been set aside upon for homework completion.
- Reduce activities if a child has so many commitments that there is insufficient time for homework.
- Have help available for every subject. This might be a parent, neighbor, friend, teacher hot line, an on-line homework service, or a tutor. The helper needs to be someone who is knowledgeable about the subject and who can help the child without becoming frustrated or angry.
- Establish a family expectation that studying for exams is expected and takes priority over other activities.

Use Homework Completion to Teach Organization Skills and Improve Learning

Keep in mind that the primary purpose of homework is to improve learning and foster work habits Possible ways to do this are to:

- Encourage your child to use an assignment book, write all assignments into the book daily, and check them off when completed. Your child should also break down long term assignments, such as projects, into smaller parts and write each part into the assignment book. Many children also find it helpful to put other commitments into the assignment book as well, including music lessons, sports, and jobs.
- Encourage your children to estimate how long it will take to complete each assignment and plan their schedule accordingly.
- Help your children set goals regarding how well they want to do on an assignment and how much effort it will take to do that well. This will help them learn to divide study time effectively.
- Help your children learn to plan for finishing assignments on time. They should start working on major assignments or reviewing for major tests well ahead.
- Help your children expand their concentration time. At first they may be able to concentrate for only 10 minutes. Parents can help their children build up this length of time gradually, so that homework takes less time. Even high school students should take a 10 to 15 minute break after studying for 45 or 50 minutes. Otherwise, they lose the ability to concentrate.
- Encourage your child to circle the verbs in directions.