

Homework is Complicated

By Jordan Sim, School Psychologist

Homework is a complicated process. It involves a sequence of events that begins in school with the teacher giving an assignment, proceeds with a transition to the home (or after-school program) that typically involves parents (or caregivers), and hopefully with the submission of homework in school. There are many reasons that homework can be a problem including: a) assignments that are too long or difficult, b) difficulty in communicating assignment to student by teacher, c) difficulty communicating between school and home, d) student not remembering or not recording assignments, e) parent – child conflict concerning homework, f) need for much parent supervision of homework, g) poor organizational strategies used by student, h) time lag in providing feedback at school, and i) need for much school-based incentives for homework performance.

Below are some strategies for addressing problems related to homework. These strategies attempt to focus on communication (addressing teacher–student, parent–teacher, and parent–child communication) and student skills (organizational and study skills).

Find the right place for homework

A location in the home where parents can provide “low level” supervision of homework works best. A location like the kitchen table is ideal, the child’s bedroom is usually less than ideal.

Have a special place for materials

A central location in the home where materials like paper, pencils, rulers and so forth are kept helps keep homework on track.

Monitor (turn off?) distractions / model work completion

Some students can be easily distracted by TV and computers being on during homework. It is helpful for parents to model work completion during homework time through activities like paying bills, writing out a shopping list, etc.

Monitor homework freedoms

For instance, having the freedom to decide when to complete homework can be quite motivating for a student. However, if procrastination becomes an issue, parents may have to provide set time parameters.

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Mix friends and homework

Many think of homework as a solitary activity, but it doesn't have to be. It may be motivating for the student to have a friend over to work on their homework then, after a period of time, they could play together.

Be watchful of additional sources for homework support

Younger students may be able to participate in supervised study periods at after-school daycare programs. Many secondary schools have after-school help provided by teachers. Sometimes a neighbor or another family member (sister, brother, cousin, or grandparent) can help.

Use agenda book to the fullest extent possible

In addition to a daily calendar, an agenda book has many other useful sources of information (e.g., multiplication tables and science facts).

Help students see time in visual blocks

Dividing the student's time (from after school to bedtime) into 30-minute visual blocks can be motivating for her or him to look at and follow. When scheduling homework into a specific block of time, try to follow it up with an activity the student likes to do.

Distribute the practice

For instance, for a fifteen-minute total study block, research shows that we remember more when we break it into 3 X 5 minute blocks spread over the day, rather than 1 X 15 minute block.

For exceeding difficulty, approach teacher

If your child is having exceeding difficulty completing homework in a reasonable amount of time and/or doesn't seem to understand the concepts, please relay this information to your child's teacher. As always, look for solutions to the problem, rather than finding blame.