

10 homework tips for parents

Easy ways parents can help their children with homework by being role models and mentors.

By **Susan R. Pollack**

The Detroit News; The Detroit News

Related

Despite their best intentions, parents might over-schedule family activities and under schedule for homework.

"What most people don't realize is how much support their kids need with homework," says Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, author of "Kids, Parents and Power Struggles" (Harper Paperbacks, \$13.95) and director of www.parentchildhelp.com. "It isn't something where you can just say, 'He's 10 or 12 or 15, he should just do it.' "

As in the business world, proper working conditions are crucial, Kurcinka and other educators say. That means helping students designate a set time and place where they can comfortably — and routinely — hit the books without being disturbed. Some families keep the TV off on weeknights and tape favorite shows for weekend watching. Following such a rule consistently, Kurcinka says, may avoid parent-child power struggles.

The best bet is to let children decide what works for them, "even if it drives you crazy," Kurcinka says. "If you have a kid who works best lying on the floor instead of sitting at a table, but the fact is his grades are great, then leave him alone. Let the grades decide."

Tips for parents

1. Establish a daily homework routine. Help your child pick a regular time and comfortable place — and stick to those habits.
2. Avoid distractions from TV, video games, social-networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), cellphones and siblings. Background music is an individual preference.
3. Store pencils, highlighters, dictionary and other homework supplies in a plastic bin to avoid wasting time searching for them.
4. Use a separate container, kept in a permanent place, for each child to dump backpacks and weed out important papers. Later, they can toss in finished work, permission slips, etc., for return to school the next day.
5. Insist your child carry — and use — a planner to list daily and future assignments with specific pages, due dates and other teacher instructions.
6. Help children prioritize homework by having them list daily assignments, then decide which is most difficult. Determine whether your child works best starting with the easiest or hardest assignment — experts differ on that point — and go from there.
7. Set up a large calendar and develop short timelines for each stage of a project so long-term assignments are not left until the last minute.

8. Teach your child to incorporate study time for future tests and long-term assignments into daily lists, and break down big assignments into smaller tasks.

9. Develop the habit, in the planner, of crossing out assignments that are completed and turned in to the teacher.

10. Make sure, as you lay out family plans, to leave enough time for kids to do their homework.

A parent's role

Harris Cooper, a homework historian and psychology professor in Duke University's Program in Education, says parents should:

Be a role model: When your children do homework, don't sit and watch TV. Read when they read. Balance your checkbook when your kids do math to help them see that the skills relate to things you do as an adult.

Be a monitor: Watch your child for signs of failure and frustration, and suggest short breaks. Provide guidance, not answers.

Be a mentor: Homework that is meant to be done alone should be left to the child. It can help develop independent lifelong learning skills.