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How to Help: A Guide to Helping with Homework

Below is a guide to assist your family with the process of homework. Take some time to consider each section and the questions that follow for each student in your family.

Education and Homework are Important

First and foremost, students need to know that adults responsible for them value homework. You can be most valuable in demonstrating the importance of homework to your students through:

Setting a Regular Time

Develop a schedule that works for your student and family based on the needs of the student and your schedules. However, develop a written schedule that establishes a set time that is required to be devoted to homework or other academic activities. By making homework an expectation and routine, students will be less likely to rush through or forget to complete assignments.

- *What time do we arrive home from school?*
- *What other activities happen on school days?*
- *When is my student most productive? (Immediately after arriving home, after 1 hour of play, after dinner, etc.)*

Pick a Place

Students are most productive when they have all necessary materials available in their study area. A study area should have plenty of light; supplies close by; fairly quiet; and space to work. By designating a space in your home to studying, you demonstrate the importance of homework as an activity.

- *Is there a permanent study space in our home?*
- *Are the necessary supplies available?*
- *Is there enough space to complete the required tasks?*
- *Is there enough light to work and read comfortably?*

Remove Distractions

In the study area and time, limit or remove distractions. Loud noise, excessive socialization or movement, electronics (like game systems, televisions, stereos, etc) or other members of the family **NOT** studying reduce anyone's effectiveness.

- *Is the study area quiet during homework time?*
- *Are electronics off/expected to be off during study time?*
- *Are other people in the study area working quietly?*
- *Are social distractions (telephone, cell phone, instant messaging) limited to homework issues?*

Provide Supplies and Resources

Ensure success by providing the materials necessary to complete homework tasks. While many families have computers, it is *NOT* necessary to provide a computer to complete homework. Keep a shelf or box stocked with school supplies readily available. This should include pens, pencils, paper, a calculator, pencil sharpener, tape, scissors, ruler, glue, dictionary, thesaurus, and a Bible. Regularly check with the student and the website regarding materials that need to be brought from the school, such as textbooks, worksheets, and notebooks.

- *Are the basic materials kept in or close to the study area?*
- *Can my student easily find other supplies he/she may need?*
- *Do I ask to see my student's assignment book?*
- *Does my student have all the required materials from school?*
- *Do I check the teacher websites for assignments and notes?*

Set and Example and Show an Interest

Show the importance of studying and reading by letting them see you reading and writing. Engage in activities that demonstrate your own “studying” and discuss what you are working on. Ask to be a part of their academic process and join activities that involve you in their homework and their life at school.

- *Do you talk with your child about the homework he/she is doing?*
- *Do you do activities with your student(s) that show your commitment to learning?*
- *Do you attend or schedule conferences with teachers?*
- *Do you use conferences before there is an issue or after?*
- *Do you regularly attend school events in which your student participates?*

Monitor Assignments

Students are more likely to be successful when someone is monitoring their homework. The level of monitoring depends on the individual student, but more monitoring is needed if assignments are not completed satisfactorily.

Ask About the Homework Policy

Take time to ask about the school and teacher homework policies. Find out the expectations, purposes, and types of homework that will be assigned. Each teacher will have different expectations regarding parental involvement and successful completion. You should be aware of all aspects of this policy to help monitor your student.

- *Have you read the handbook and homework policy regarding school expectations?*
- *Have you read or discussed the policy of your student's teacher(s)?*

Be Available and Review Completed Assignments

Students often appreciate someone in the same area while working on assignments in case they have questions. Moreover, completed work should be reviewed for accuracy and completion, especially for elementary students or any student that is struggling to successfully complete homework. Make yourself, or someone, available while students are working. If that is not possible, establish an expectation to review work at an agreed upon time.

- *Is someone available to sit with/near your student while they are working on homework?*
- *Is your student left alone to complete assignments alone?*
- *Is completed work reviewed?*
- *Do you feel capable of assisting/reviewing completed work?*
- *What resources would make it easier to aid your student?*

Provide Guidance

Parental role in the homework process should be directing students through the learning process. Parents should not feel responsible for completing the assignment, rather helping students to find THEIR way through the task. There are several things that will help this process.

Figure Out How Your Student Learns Best

Take some time to observe your student or discuss learning styles with your student's teacher(s). Plan study time and study areas according to individual learning strengths?

- *Does my student learn best when...*
 - o *Working alone or with someone else?*
 - o *Seeing things, i.e. drawing a picture of the parts of a flower?*
 - o *Hearing Things, i.e. being read to or directions explained out loud?*
 - o *Doing Things/Touching Things/Handling Things, i.e acting out a story or using actual objects to solve a math problem?*

Help Your Student Get Organized and Maintain Good Study Habits

Model behaviors you wish to see in your students. Provide them a step-by-step guide to the process of homework. As mentioned earlier, set a regular time, develop a schedule, and provide a space to work, gather the necessary materials, record assignments, review and study early and often. Involve your student in completing each of these steps while you work with them. Show them how to appropriately study through your own habits. This will develop a process that can be replicated with decreasing amounts of parental supervision.

- *Have you practiced good homework habits with your student?*
- *Have you established good study habits?*
- *Have you maintained your expectations without your direct involvement?*

Give Praise

Everyone needs feedback when completing a task. Take time to praise and constructively correct completed work. Focus on the successes while redirecting mistakes. Highlight the positives in the work or the process, while correcting areas that fell short of expectations.

- *Have you praised your student for their successes?*
- *Do you positively reinforce good habits while correcting poor habits?*
- *Do you review teacher comments and scores on homework and exams?*

Adapted from "How to Help" article from U.S. Dept. of Education available at <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/part5.html>