
Helping Your Teen With Homework

During the middle- and high-school years, 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 teen 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 teen 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 teen 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.

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 kids 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.

Homework Problems

Especially in the later grades, 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.
- **Be in touch with school.** Maintain contact with guidance counselors and teachers throughout the school year to stay informed, especially if your teen is struggling. They'll keep you apprised of what's going on at school and how to help your teen.
- **Don't forget the study skills.** Help your teen 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.
- **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. Praise your teen's hard work and effort, and ask the guidance counselor or teachers for resources for support if you need them.

Don't wait for report cards 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 teen 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 teens and foster lifelong skills they'll need to succeed in school and beyond.