

Making the Homework Connection

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For some parents of gifted children, homework comes with many hassles, leaving Mom and Dad with more questions than answers: What is the purpose and value of homework? What is a reasonable amount of homework? When should I help, and when should I stand back? Following are some answers to these questions and practical strategies parents can use to avoid homework battles.

Why Homework?

Teachers assign homework for different reasons: to reinforce or enrich ideas and skills taught in the classroom; to allow for completion of unfinished class work; to give opportunities for in-depth, independent exploration of topics of interest; or to check children's levels of mastery and understanding. Homework also helps develop study, time management, and independent learning skills. It serves as the link between the school and the home, and for parents it can be an opportunity to gain insight into what is (and isn't) happening in their children's classroom. By being involved in your child's homework, you can better understand his or her strengths, interests, weaknesses, and attitudes toward learning.

How Much Homework?

The amount of time spent on homework varies as much as the purposes. A good rule of thumb for determining a healthy amount of homework time is ten minutes per grade. Children in kindergarten might expect ten minutes per day of homework, whereas children in sixth grade might anticipate an hour. As students enter middle and high school, the amount of homework may vary by subject, and the nature of homework may shift from nightly assignments to weekly projects and research papers. Your child's teachers can tell you how much time they expect their students to be doing homework. Some schools have developed policies specifying the nature and extent of homework, and you should request, examine, and discuss these policies with your child's teacher.

Solving the Homework Problem

Despite the good reasons for homework, for some gifted children and their parents just the mention of the "h-word" results in a nightly battle, with exasperated cries of

- I did it all in school.
- But this is boring and stupid! I left my math book in my desk.
- Do I have to be in the gifted program if I have to make up all this work?
- Why do I have to have homework any way? This is a waste of time!

Some of these responses come from inappropriate homework or expectations for it. If your child's homework is too difficult or too easy, plan a meeting with the teacher to discuss the best way forward. Remember, it is the *quality* of homework, not the *quantity*, that makes a difference.

For some gifted children, a special class or program that removes them from their regular classroom is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, their special abilities are recognized and addressed; on the other, if they are expected to make up all missed work from the regular classroom, their time is wasted on work they have already mastered. If your child's homework includes work of this nature, discuss this with his or her teachers.

Finally, some gifted children really struggle with their homework because of motivational factors, a lack of study skills, limited organizational know-how, or poor time management. Apart from discussing these issues with your child's teacher, consider these practical ideas:

- Take an active interest in your child's schooling. Ask specific questions about what he or she is learning each day.
- Set aside a time and a place for regular study. This may be a quiet time during which everyone in the family can work together on homework, reading, letter writing, and the like. Be sure that the room is well lit, is comfortable, and has the necessary supplies.
- Teach and encourage organizational skills and time management. For example, buy your son or daughter a weekly planner or calendar to set homework goals.
- Guide your child through homework, offering assistance when needed but not doing it yourself.
- Establish clear expectations and consequences, but don't forget to celebrate your son or daughter's successes.

Taking the hassle out of homework requires open communication between parents, children, and teachers. With clear expectations and proper support, homework can provide what is intended, an opportunity to grow and learn.

—Tracy Riley, *PhD*

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