

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, video games, smartphones, and other devices.

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.

Find out which sites teachers are recommending and bookmark them for easy access. Teach your teen how to look for reliable sources of information and double-check any that look questionable.

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.

More tips to help make homework easier for your teen:

- **Plan ahead.** Regularly sit down with your teen to go over class loads and make sure they're balanced. If your teen has a particularly big workload from classes, you may want to see if you can shuffle the daily schedule so that there's a study hall during the day or limit after-school activities. Teachers or guidance counselors might have some perspective on which classes are going to require more or less work.
- **Establish a routine.** Send the message that schoolwork is a top priority with ground rules like setting a regular time and place each day for homework to be done. And make it clear that there's no TV, phone calls, video game-playing, etc., until homework is done and checked.
- **Instill organization skills.** No one is born with great organizational skills – they're learned and practiced over time. Most kids first encounter multiple teachers and classrooms in middle school, when organization becomes a key to succeeding. Give your teen a calendar or personal planner to help get organized.
- **Apply school to the "real world."** Talk about how what teens learn now applies outside the classroom, such as the importance of meeting deadlines – as they'll also have to do in the workplace – or how topics in history class relate to what's happening in today's news.

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. If your son is frazzled by geometry problems he's been trying to solve for hours, for instance, suggest he take a break, maybe by shooting some hoops with you. A fresh mind may be all he needed, but when it's time to return to homework, ask how you can help.
- **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. They can guide you to tutoring options, offer perspective on course load, and provide guidance on any issues, such as dyslexia, ADHD, or vision or hearing difficulties. You can also be kept in the loop about tests, quizzes, and projects.
- **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. When you're helping your teen study for a test, for instance, suggest such strategies as using flashcards to memorize facts or taking notes and underlining while reading.
- **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. Encourage your teen to ask for help, if needed, but remember that in school students are rewarded for knowing the right answers, and no one likes to stand out by saying that they don't have them. 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.

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