

Helping Children with Homework: The Basics

Before discussing ways you can help your child with homework, it is important to discuss why teachers assign homework and how it benefits your child.

Why do teachers assign homework? Teachers assign homework for many reasons. Homework can help children review and practice what they've learned; get ready for the next day's class; learn to use resources, such as libraries, reference materials, and encyclopedias; and explore subjects more fully than time permits in the classroom.

Homework can also help children develop good habits and attitudes. It can teach children to work independently; encourage self-discipline and responsibility (assignments provide some youngsters with their first chance to manage time and meet deadlines); and encourage a love of learning.

Homework can also bring parents and educators closer together. Parents who supervise homework and work with their children on assignments learn about their children's education and about the school.

Homework is meant to be a positive experience and to encourage children to learn. Assignments should not be used as punishment.

Does homework help children learn? Homework helps your child do better in school when assignments are meaningful, are completed successfully, and are returned with constructive comments from the teacher. An assignment should have a specific purpose, come with clear instructions, be fairly well matched to a student's abilities, and designed to help develop a student's knowledge and skills.

In the early elementary grades, homework can help children develop the habits and attitudes described earlier. From fourth through sixth grades, small amounts of homework, gradually increased every year, may support improved academic achievement. In seventh grade and beyond, students who complete more homework score better on standardized tests and earn better grades, on the average, than students who do less homework. The difference in test scores and grades between students who do more homework and those who do less increases as children move up through the grades.

What's the right amount of homework? Many educators believe that homework is most effective for the majority of children in first through third grades when it does not exceed 20 minutes each school day. From fourth through sixth grades, many educators recommend from 20 to 40 minutes a school day for most students. For students in seventh through ninth grades, generally, up to 2 hours a school day is thought to be suitable.

Amounts that vary from these guidelines are fine for some students. Talk with your child's teacher if you are concerned about either too much or too little homework.