

Homework and Study Habits: Tips for Kids and Teenagers

Certain key practices will make life easier for everyone in the family when it comes to studying and organization. However, some of the methods may require an adjustment for other members of the family.

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Turn off the TV. Make a house rule, depending on the location of the screen, that when it is study time, it is “no TV” time. A running tv will draw kids like bees to honey.

What about the radio or other audio devices? Should it be on or off? Contrary to what many specialists say, some kids do seem to function well with the radio turned on to a favorite music station. (Depending on the layout of your house or apartment, maybe an investment in earbuds would be worthy of consideration.)

Set specific rules about using cell phones during study hours. For instance, use of a cell phone can only occur if it becomes necessary to call a schoolmate to confirm an assignment or discuss particularly challenging homework.

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studying. Designate specific areas for homework and studying. Possibilities include the kitchen, dining room, or your child's bedroom. Eliminate as much distraction as possible. Since many kids will study in their rooms, the function becomes more important than beauty.

Most desks for kids don't have enough space to spread out materials. A table that allows for all necessary supplies such as pencils, pens, paper, books, and other essentials works exceptionally well.

Consider placing a bulletin board in your child's room above the desk. Your local hardware store may sell wallboard that is inexpensive and perfect to post essential school items. You may decide to paint or cover it with burlap to improve its appearance or let your child take on this project.

Keeping general supplies on hand is important. Check with your child about his or her needs. Make it his/her responsibility to be well supplied with paper, pencils, notepads, etc.

Encourage the use of a notebook for writing down assignments so there is no confusion about when they must be turned in to the teacher.

Consistency is a critical factor in academic success. Try to organize the household so that dinner is at a regular hour, and once it's over, it's time to crack the books. If your child doesn't have other commitments and gets home reasonably

early from school, some homework completion can occur before dinner.

Consider your child's developmental level when setting the amount of time for homework. While high school students can focus for over an hour, first-graders are unlikely to last more than 15 minutes on a single task. Allow your child to take breaks, perhaps as a reward for finishing a section of the work.

Organize study and homework projects. Get a large dry erase calendar — one that allows space for jotting things down in the daily boxes. Have your child use different bold colored dry erase markers to write exam dates, reports that are coming due, etc. This will serve as a reminder so that assignments aren't set aside until the last minute.

Teach your child that studying is more than just doing homework assignments. One of the most misunderstood aspects of schoolwork is the difference between studying and doing homework assignments. Encourage your child to do things such as:

- take notes as he's/she's reading a chapter
- learn to skim material
- learn to study tables and charts
- learn to summarize what he/she has read in his/her own words

- learn to make his/her own flashcards for a quick review of dates, formulas, spelling words, etc.

Note-taking is a critical skill and needs

development. Many students don't know how to take notes in classes that require them. Some feel they have to write down every word the teacher says. Others have wisely realized the value of an outline form of note-taking. Well prepared teachers present their material in a format that lends itself to outline form note taking.

Should notes ever be rewritten? In some cases, they should be, particularly if there is a lot of covered material. Sometimes a child has to write quickly but lacks speed and organization. Rewriting notes takes time, but it can be an excellent review of the subject matter. However, rewriting notes isn't worth the time unless they are useful for review and recall of valuable information.

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Help your child to feel confident about taking tests. Test taking can be a traumatic experience for some students. Explain to your child that burning the midnight oil (cramming) the night before a test isn't productive. It's better to get a good night's sleep.

Students also need reminding that when taking a test, they

should thoroughly and carefully read the directions before they haphazardly start to mark their test papers. They should be advised to skip over questions for which they don't know the answers — they can always return to those if there's time. Good advice for any student before taking a test: take a deep breath, relax, and dive in. Always bring an extra pencil just in case.

During a homework session, watch for signs of frustration. No learning can take place and little can be accomplished if your child is angry or upset over an assignment that is too long or too difficult. At such times, you may have to step in and halt the homework for that night, offering to write a note to the teacher explaining the situation and perhaps requesting a conference to discuss the quality and length of homework assignments.

Should parents help with homework? Yes — if it's productive to do so, such as calling out spelling words or checking a math problem that won't prove. No — if it's something your child can handle himself and learn from the process.

Help and support should always be calm and cheerful. Grudging help is worse than no help at all! Read directions, or check over math problems after your child has completed the work. Remember to make positive comments — you don't want your child to associate homework with fights at home.

Model research skills by involving your child in planning a family trip. Help him/her to locate your destination on a map or in an atlas. Use a traditional encyclopedia to find information about the place you will visit; try the Internet or books in the library.

How best to handle report cards? To save shocks and upsets, from time to time discuss how things are going at school with your child. You can say something casual, such as:

- "How did the math test go?"
- "How did you do on the history report?"
- "How's your science project coming along? Need any help?"

These questions aren't giving the "third degree," but indicate interest. Find out if it's a policy at your child's school to send out "warning notices" when work isn't going well. Generally, such notices require the parent's signature to verify that the parent has, indeed, been alerted. This is the time to contact the teacher of course, along with your child, to learn what the difficulty may be. If such notices aren't sent, then grades may be posted online.

Be tuned in to statements such as "He's an awful teacher," "She goes too fast," etc. This may be your child's way of indicating frustration in understanding content or lack of study

time with the subject. However, be cautious in contacting teachers without your child's knowledge. It may disrupt good feelings between you and make you seem to be interfering.

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