

Homework Helpers!

- Maintain two-way communication with your child.**
Don't just lecture. Listen and respond to what your child has to say. When you respond, don't plead or argue. (Pleading puts your child in charge; arguing creates a no-win situation.) Instead, respond assertively and positively.
- Don't give your child a choice unless you mean it.**
Instead of saying, "Would you like to work on your science homework now?" Say, "It's time to work on your science homework. Please join me at the table." Or, if you really want to offer a choice between two tasks, phrase it in a way that's likely to get the desired response. *Example: "you can do your science homework now or after dinner. But if you wait until after dinner, we won't have time to go to the park."*
- Set goals with, not for, your child. Then focus on one at a time.**
Start with a goal that your child is almost guaranteed to achieve. That will make the others more appealing and continued success more likely.
- Expect progress.**
We all respond to the expectations other people have of us (this is known as the self-fulfilling prophecy syndrome). If your expectations are low, your child's achievements are likely to match them. If your expectations are high, *but not unreasonable*, your child will respond in kind.
- Make your child aware of her improvement. Reward achievement.**
Don't "pay" for every accomplishment with a treat or a promise. Often it's good simply to say, "You did a really good job on that map. I'm proud of you." But if your child works especially hard on a challenging assignment and completes it successfully, that's worth celebrating.
- Praise generously, yet honestly.**
Praise will lose its effectiveness if used indiscriminately, plus a child can usually tell when you're not being sincere.
- Direct praise to the task at hand.**
Saying, "You spelled 8 out of 10 words right. Much better!" is more specific than "Good for you!" Specific phrase guides future behavior.

8. **Try not to show disappointment if your child doesn't do as well as you'd like.**
Look for your child's strengths; avoid criticism. The child whose performance is poor doesn't need reminding; she needs encouragement and reassurance that you value her, *regardless of her performance*.
9. **Be enthusiastic. Use humor.**
Starting every homework session with the *Star Wars* theme might be going overboard. But it doesn't hurt to smile and say, "I like spending this time with you." And you don't have to be deadly serious about it. Laughter, shared jokes, and even a tickle or two can go a long way toward lightening the homework load.
10. **Use timers and competition wisely.**
For some children, a timer spurs effort and ends stalling; for others, it's anxiety producing. If the latter seems true for your child, put the timer away. Some children enjoy competing against themselves and trying to better their past achievements, and if this is the case with your child, that's fine. But competition with friends, brothers, or sisters can be threatening and debilitating, especially if the child is at an academic disadvantage.
11. **Be prepared to teach.**
Even though the teacher is responsible for teaching the subject matter, information sent is not always information received. You may need to "fill in the blanks" and review concepts from time to time. Skimming the textbook and carefully reading lesson materials and handouts will prepare you for this role.
12. **Use concrete, hands-on materials whenever possible, especially (but not exclusively) when working with a young child.**
For example, it's easier to learn $2+3$ with blocks than with pictures. And for most people, it's easier to learn with pictures than with numbers.
13. **Help your child build associations between what she already knows and what is being learned.**
Children learn new concepts by recognizing how they are like and different from concepts they already know. *Examples:* "Multiplying fractions is like regular multiplying except..." "A stream is like the canal behind grandma's house except..." "The electrons in an atom circle the proton. What circles the sun?" A child who mentally pictures the solar system has a better understanding of what goes on in an atom.
14. **Provide adequate practice.**
Children shouldn't just learn material; they should actually *overlearn* it to promote the development of long-term memory. Try to ignore complaints of "We

already did that! This is boring!" But don't run a subject or concept into the ground. Know when to stop.

15. **Provide variety.**

If the child starts fidgeting excessively over a math book, switch to spelling for a while. Return to the math later. In between, share a snack, take a short walk, or have a joke telling session.

16. **Encourage creativity.**

Although you should be careful about "sticking to the rules," a certain amount of creativity can "help the medicine go down." A story in one of the basal readers (Reading Textbooks) tells of a child whose Thanksgiving homework assignment was to make a Pilgrim doll. The child's mother was an Eastern European immigrant. The child dressed the doll in Russian attire, and the doll served as a lesson to the class that the United States has had many kinds of Pilgrims over the years.

17. **Encourage independence.**

For example, if your child is able to read directions independently, encourage her to do so.

18. **Take every opportunity to build your child's self-esteem.**

This includes, but isn't confined to, most of the other tips already presented here. Use your imagination and your natural affection and concern to think of other ways to show your child that she is a worthwhile and important person.

19. **Check with the teacher before correcting your child's homework.**

Many teachers want to see a student's mistakes; they use them to determine where more teaching is called for. A perfect parent-corrected paper can be misleading and can rob a child of the extra help she may need.

20. **Show a positive attitude toward school.**

If you have problems with your child's school or teacher, don't discuss them with the child. Instead, show your respect for school by emphasizing the importance of regular attendance, a neat appearance, and grades that reflect your child's true capabilities. Then make an appointment to speak privately with the teacher.