

Beating Homework Battles

Homework: a contentious issue. Many parents feel that homework is an essential way of consolidating skills learnt in school – as well as giving them the opportunity to see what their child has been learning. But there are also some parents (and teachers) who feel that homework is a bit of a waste of time, and offers little to help a child improve.

Like it or not, though, homework is a fact of life for most children, and will remain so until they finish their education, so developing a positive approach is important. However, there will inevitably come a time when your child will be reluctant to do their homework, and if you're not careful, it will become a battleground.

What can parents do to prevent this from happening?

1 Be Organised

Know what your child has to complete and when it's due to be handed in. That way you won't be caught out at 9pm on a Sunday with three pieces of homework due in the next day. Be careful not to take over this organisation from your child, though. It is important that they develop their own skills of organisation and independence, especially as they approach secondary school age. Ask them what homework they have and when it's due in, then talk about when the best time would be to complete the work.

2 Find a Good Time

Some children like to complete homework as soon as it's set. Others leave everything to the last minute. Either way, make sure your child is not tired, hungry, thirsty or in need of some 'downtime' when they sit down to do their work. Also, remind them that homework needs to be fitted in around their other commitments and pastimes, whether this is football practice, music lessons, TV time or social engagements.

3 Find a Good Place

It is important that children have a quiet, well-lit space, free from distractions, in order to complete their work. Also, make sure that they have all the resources they need to hand – pens, pencils, rubbers, rulers and so on.

4 Sit down with Them

If homework is becoming a challenge or your child seems to be losing focus, make some time in your schedule to sit down with them and talk through the work. Ask them to tell you what they think they need to do, and attempt to redirect their focus back to the task in hand.

5 Encourage Breaks

If your child has been working for around 30 minutes, encourage a 5 minute break. They can put on some music and dance around, do some stretching exercises, fetch a drink and a snack – anything which enables them to switch off. Studies show that a 5 minute break every 30 minutes is very effective in renewing concentration levels.

6 Make It Practical

Where possible, relate the homework tasks to the real world. If your child has maths homework on multiplication and division, use beads or buttons to work out the answers. If they have a science project on flowers, go outside and look at some flowers – talking about what your child has been learning.

7 Praise Effort Not Outcome

If your child has worked really hard on something, this is what you should be praising. Teach them to value the hard work that they are putting in as well as the results they are getting. Also, make sure you focus on what they have got right before you move on to what is wrong.

8 Talk about Your Experiences

It is never a good idea to say things like, 'Well I was rubbish at maths when I was at school, so it's no wonder you find it hard too.' This teaches children that ability is fixed and/or inherited and they are likely to bother even less. However, you can talk about things you found difficult when you were faced with homework and how you overcame these difficulties. You can also talk about times (if these happened) when you didn't complete homework, or didn't do it well, and how this made you feel.

9 Talk about the Pros and Cons

If your child is very resistant to doing their work, talk honestly and calmly about the consequences. Depending on your child's age, these could range from not doing well in a spelling test to receiving a detention. Also, talk about the long-term consequences - lower grades, or not doing as well as you are capable of. If you feel it's appropriate, build in some rewards at home for completed work - 'if you learn these tables, we'll go for a bike ride,' or 'once that sheet's finished you can have 10 minutes of extra screen time.'

10 Remain Calm

Don't let homework become a battle. It is far better to leave it undone and let your child face the consequences at school, than for it to turn into a shouting match at home, as this will simply create a vicious cycle that will be hard to break. If you feel that your child is truly resistant to completing work because they cannot do it or lack faith in their ability to do it, then make an appointment to speak to their teacher to see if there is an underlying issue that needs to be dealt with.

