

Helping Your Child Handle Homework

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Homework battles can be heard all over town each night, as parents attempt to help their children manage their time and complete their tasks. Some children can focus easily and breeze through their work, while others have trouble getting started, may get frustrated easily, or get distracted by the slightest noise. The skills you help your child develop in doing homework will serve them well when they are in college and in the work world.

Some children need some time to play or relax right after school, while others prefer to get their homework done right away. Talk with your child and together come up with a plan that fits well with your child's temperament and age.

Parents can help children who are very active, or who get overwhelmed easily, by setting a homework schedule that has breaks built into the routine.

We've found that the timer can be an asset in helping to keep your child's frustrations to a minimum. Here's an example of an active 10-year-old who is slow adapting (has trouble with transitions) and intense (has strong reactions).

Father: *(It's 5 PM and he has just come home after picking Jason up from karate class.)* Jason, what are you doing watching TV? Don't you have some homework to do?

Jason: I only have a little bit, I'll do it later dad.

Father: *(Talking as he walks away.)* You know you have to get good grades this year if you want to continue karate. I don't want to see you getting lazy. You should really start now. I have a meeting later, so if you need help, now is the time to get it.

Jason: *(Yelling from the TV room.)* Dad, I'm tired, gimme a break. Why do you have to bug me all the time about my work? I'll get it done tonight or in the morning.

Dinner is late and Jason continues to watch TV until 6:30 PM. At 7 PM, after dinner, he gets out his homework assignment and starts to whine.

Jason: Oh no! I forgot that I had to go to the library to get two books for my report. I also have this dumb math sheet to do and spelling words to memorize. Dad, please take me to the library now, otherwise my teacher will kill me.

Father: Jason, I told you earlier that I had a meeting tonight. I can't take you to the library tonight, plus I can't help you with your spelling. Why didn't you check your work earlier like I asked you to? See, now you're stuck. Why can't you be responsible?

Jason runs out of the room crying, saying that he hates school and just wants to go to bed. He slams the door to his room.

Father: Jason, come into the kitchen so we can talk about homework.

Jason: I know you're going to say I'm too lazy and dumb.

Father: No Jason, I want your help in figuring out a regular routine for getting your homework done on time, but I also want you to get the breaks you need. Tell me what you think of this plan:

- After school you'll take out your homework assignment and we'll look at it together and estimate how long it will take you to do.
- If you don't have much work you can start after dinner.
- If it looks like you have a lot of work, you can take a 30-minute break and then begin your work before dinner.

- You can use the timer so you don't get distracted and lose track of time. For every 30 minutes you work you can take a break. How long a break do you think you'll need after working for 30 minutes?

Jason: I like to have time to play with my video games. A 15-minute break would be okay, but I'd like to play longer once I finish my work.

Father: That sounds like a good plan. I do want to make sure that on the days you don't have sports after school you ride your bike or shoot some hoops. Homework, TV, and video games don't give you the physical exercise your body and brain need to function well. You can watch one or two programs after school on the days you come home early — but no more than that.

Jason: Okay, but can I watch some TV at night?

Father: After I've checked your work, you can watch a show or do videos, if you're finished with all of your work and it's before bedtime. Let's get the timer out, so you can keep track of your work time and breaks. It might be a good idea to talk again next week and see if this is working. I'm sure that as time goes by, you'll be able to judge how much work time you need without my help.

They write out the plan and post it on the refrigerator.

Key Points:

- The timer can help a child pace the work, taking breaks at reasonable intervals. Some children will work for five minutes and think they've been at it for much longer.
- Make sure you talk with your child about what is needed. Watch and see if your plan is realistic. It's good to check in with your child in a few days to see how the plan is working.
- Over time you may not need to use the timer if your child has developed a pattern of getting work done and taking short breaks. The timer is a training tool that some people need more than others. An older child may prefer to use a clock.
- Point out how pleasant it is when you aren't nagging about homework and your child isn't ignoring the work that needs to get done on time.