

Resolving Homework Issues

*“Perhaps the most valuable result of education is
the ability to make yourself do the thing
that you have to do when it ought to be done.”*

-Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895)
English physician, writer, and lecturer

Module 5.7

Understanding Parenting and Power

Resolving Homework Issues

Note to Parent Educator:

For those of you who may be working with parents who show very little interest and involvement in their children's education, and more specifically homework, it will be more useful to focus on Chart No. 1: Homework Roles, Handout Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 and Activity No. 1: Zeroing in on Homework Problems rather than Handout No. 3: Which Parent Are You? in the main body of the lesson. As always, it is important to know your parents and to adapt the PPE material to fit their needs.

Materials

- Name tags
- Trifold parent handout, charts, activities, and other materials as specified
- Chalkboard or large tablet

References

- *Ending the Homework Hassle* by John Rosemond, Publisher: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1990
- *Making the Best of Schools* by Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton, Publisher: Yale UP, 1990
- *Homework without Tears* by Lee Canter and Lee Hausner, Publisher: HarperCollins, 1988
- *How to Help Your Child with Homework* by Marguerite Radencich and Jeanne Shay Schumm, Publisher: Free Spirit Publishing, 1988
- *Winning the Homework War* by Fredric Levine and Kathleen Anesko, Publisher: Prentice Hall, 1987

Additional Readings for Parent Educators

- *Overcoming Underachieving* by Ruth Peters, Publisher: Broadway Books, 2000
- *Steps to Homework Success* by Sydney Zentall and Sam Goldstein, Publisher: Specialty Press, 1999
- *The Homework Handbook* by Harriett Cholden, Ethel Tiersky and John Friedman, Publisher: NTC Publishing Group, 1998
- *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, 2nd ed. by Marguerite Radencich, Minneapolis, MN, Publisher: Free Spirit Publishing, 1997
- *Mega Skills* by Dorothy Rich, Publisher: Houghton Mifflin, 1997

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the long-term benefits of homework
- Gain ideas for establishing a home environment conducive to learning
- Develop strategies for promoting positive homework attitudes and habits in the home
- Gain insight and skills for responding to the reluctant learner

The Lesson

I. Introduction

There are few issues that create as much dissention and conflict between parents and children as homework does. Between the hours of 3:30 p.m. and 10 p.m. on school evenings, comments such as these can be heard in households across our nation:

“I don’t have any homework tonight.”

“This homework is stupid! I don’t know why I have to do it!”

“I’ll do it later!”

“Why do kids have to do homework? Parents don’t have homework.”

“I have so much homework tonight, I’ll never get it all done.”

“I hate homework!”

These responses often evoke feelings of frustration, anger, and helplessness from parents.

Invite parents to share their concerns and frustrations regarding homework and where they would like some help. List their ideas on a chalkboard or flip chart and leave them on display so that they can be addressed when bringing closure to the session.

II. Instruction

Most research studies in education identify the parent and the home environment as the most important key to a child’s educational achievement. In a study conducted by the Center of the American Experiment, Chester Finn found that by the time a youngster reaches his eighteenth birthday, he has spent approximately nine percent of his hours under the school roof. Ninety-one percent is spent elsewhere. Obviously, the home environment is a major influence on how a child performs in and outside the school setting. The development of good study habits and attitudes toward learning and work need to be generated in the home. This is a process that occurs over time and may take many years to develop and mature. Homework provides an important avenue through which parents can be an active participant in the learning/work process of their child.

Although homework is often a source of frustration and conflict in the home, there are many benefits to be derived from it. *Elicit ideas on the often hidden benefits of homework and record these for display on the chalkboard or flip chart. Suggestions to add to parents’ ideas:*

- ✓ Reinforcing the learning in the classroom
- ✓ Practicing or reviewing skills
- ✓ Enriching learning beyond the material covered in class
- ✓ Developing independent work habits
- ✓ Learning self-discipline
- ✓ Developing a sense of responsibility
- ✓ Learning decision making skills
- ✓ Developing organizational skills
- ✓ Exercising good judgment
- ✓ Developing problem solving skills
- ✓ Enabling parents to know what the child is learning at school

Addressing homework issues must begin with a clear understanding of role clarification. What is the role and responsibility of the child? What is the role and responsibility of the parent? When these roles are not clearly defined, there is a blurring of boundaries and conflict and many other problems usually arise.

Using Chart No. 1: Homework Roles, discuss the role of the parent, the child, and the teacher. See Handout No. 1: Encouraging Young Learners and Handout No. 2: The Homework Environment for more specific guidelines. Be sure to encourage participant input.

The parental role in homework is a very critical, necessary element; however, it needs to be an indirect role, one of providing guidance and support. When we as parents cross over this line into the child's territory of responsibility, we begin to create problems for the child, as well as ourselves.

How we approach homework with a child should be based on the child's age. Helping children develop good homework and study habits is a process that can start in early childhood and should progress in age appropriate stages.

For children in:

Preschool (ages three to five)

- ✓ Teach responsibility by giving age appropriate chores
- ✓ Help children learn to follow directions and to develop listening skills (Ask parents for suggestions and give some of your own.)

Kindergarten through grade three

- ✓ Teach organization and time management skills
- ✓ Have a set time and place for homework that you and your child decide on together
- ✓ Encourage children to do work before play
- ✓ Teach problem solving skills (*Ask parents for suggestions and give some of your own.*)

Grades four and five

- ✓ Continue teaching time management skills by helping children learn to divide a large project into smaller steps and plan what is needed to complete the project
- ✓ Teach children to schedule their day starting with amount of time needed to get ready in the morning, school time, and after school activities, homework, chores, and personal time
- ✓ Allow child to experience "natural" consequences of getting a bad grade when homework is not turned in on time. Parents should not do homework for the child!

Grades six and up

- ✓ They're on their own! Let children know you are available as a resource, but avoid becoming directly involved in homework.
- ✓ Limit your involvement to 15 minutes per subject

III. Activity

In a study of Bay Area, California high school students, Sanford Dornbusch found that styles of parenting are very closely correlated to children's overall academic performance. Authoritarian (rigid and controlling) styles of parenting are associated with the lowest performance, permissive (loosely structured) the next lowest performance, and authoritative (strong, but open to discussion and negotiation) with the highest performance. These results were demonstrated across various ethnic groups, education levels, and family structures.

Let's look at more specific parent behaviors that may have a powerful influence on how a child performs in the homework arena. (*This activity for learning is through the use of a carousel activity in which the group is divided into four subgroups and rotates to different stations where there is a writing surface [chalkboard, flip chart]. Subgroups remain at each station for one to one-and-one-half minutes to respond to the appropriate headings and to add to the ideas presented by those groups preceding them. After the cycle has been completed, invite a reporter from each original group to summarize the ideas.*) See Handout No. 3: *Which Parent Are You?* for additional ideas.

Station headings:

- ✓ Behaviors of the Overly Involved Parent
- ✓ Children's Reactions to the Overly Involved Parent
- ✓ Behaviors of the Encouraging Parent
- ✓ Children's Reactions to the Encouraging Parent

IV. Instruction

All children will occasionally exhibit behaviors similar to those responding to the overly involved parent. It is when we see a pattern or a frequency of these behaviors that it becomes necessary to evaluate our role as a parent and to look at how our behaviors might be affecting the child. In order to bring about change in a child's behavior, the parent must first be willing to make some changes in his own behavior. It is important to understand that the only way we can bring about change in another person is to change the way we respond to and interact with that person. The older the child, the more difficult the change may be, however, change can be made by remaining firm and consistent and following through with consequences.

Other techniques for changing reluctant homework patterns are:

1. Determine whether there might be special circumstances underlying homework resistance, e.g., learning disabilities, emotional problems, lack of organizational skills or self-discipline, problems with peers or difficulties at school, etc.
2. Acknowledge the child's apparent feelings regarding homework, but let him know very emphatically that homework is his responsibility. You will support his efforts, but you will in no way do his work for him.
3. Make it clear that there are many areas of negotiation in this household, but that homework is not a negotiable item.
4. Set very clear rules regarding homework (e.g., time, location, duration, quality, etc.). Establish consequences for when these rules are not adhered to and follow through consistently.
5. To avoid the "I don't have any homework" syndrome or rushing through homework just to be done, establish a routine "study time" when the child spends a certain amount of time on learning, whether it be homework, reading, or review.
6. Acknowledge and reward small steps toward improvement. Social rewards such as a hug, encouraging words, getting to choose a family activity, or having a friend over to play are often the most satisfying rewards.
7. Avoid rescuing the child from any consequences of his failure to meet homework requirements, even if it means getting a zero or going to summer school. The younger the child can experience the consequences of his behavior, the earlier the problem can be resolved.
8. Maintain ongoing dialogue with the school, providing feedback and ideas. When parents and teachers work together as a team, the child is less apt to get by with such habits.
9. If changes do not occur after a reasonable amount of time and effort in applying effective techniques, seek professional assistance.

V. Closure

Refer back to the list of parent concerns expressed at the beginning of the session to see if they have been addressed. Talk about any that were not covered.

Homework need not be a nightly battle in the home. The role of the parent is to provide adequate support, consistency, and guidance for the child, particularly during the primary years. When this is done properly, parental involvement should lessen through the years. Even with the older, independent learner, parents need to demonstrate continued interest, enthusiasm, support, and role modeling. Be aware that encouraging lifelong skills is the primary focus of homework.

Healthy attitudes and values that parents instill in the home environment can create lifelong building blocks that will enable children to lead satisfying and productive lives.

“A child’s mind is like a bank—whatever you put in, you get back in ten years, with interest.”

—Frederic Wertham

Chart

- Chart No. 1: *Homework Roles*

Activity

- Activity No. 1: *Zeroing in on Homework Problems*

Handouts

- Handout No. 1: *Encouraging Young Learners*
- Handout No. 2: *The Homework Environment*
- Handout No. 3: *Which Parent Are You?*
- Handout No. 4: *Changing Reluctant Homework Patterns*
- Handout No. 5: *Weekly Assignment Chart*
- Handout No. 6: *Daily Assignment Chart*

Complementary Modules

- Module 1.1: *Understanding the Family Systems as a Whole*
- Module 3.1: *Communicating Effectively with Children at all Stages*
- Module 4.1: *Building and Nurturing Self-Esteem in Children*
- Module 4.5: *Helping Children Learn to Make Healthy Choices*
- Module 5.1: *Establishing Authority as a Parent*
- Module 5.3: *Giving Children Responsibility for Themselves*
- Module 5.5: *Encouraging Motivation in Children*
- Module 5.6: *Developing Teamwork in a Child's Educational Experience*

Suggested Readings for Parents

- *Overcoming Underachieving* by Ruth Peters, Publisher: Broadway Books, 2000
- *Steps to Homework Success* by Sydney Zentall and Sam Goldstein, Publisher: Specialty Press, 1999

- *The Homework Handbook* by Harriett Cholden, Ethel Tiersky, and John Friedman, Publisher: NTC Publishing Group, 1998
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Suggested Parenting Quick Tips

- *Fighting The Homework War?*
- *It's Time To Make Some Rules*
- *Power Struggles...No One Wins!*
- *Report Card Time?*

Lesson Activity

List any homework issues that seem to be creating problems for you and/or your child.

What do you see as the underlying benefits of homework?

Practical Parent Education

The future of America rests in its homes.

- Abraham Lincoln

Parenting is perhaps the most important role in society. Children are our future. And yet, rearing children is a challenging and complicated task. All parents need support, education and resources as they strive to promote the healthy development of their children in what has become a very complex world. Your community is committed to providing you with quality services through Practical Parent Education as you strive to rear responsible, self-confident, mentally healthy children.

For further information regarding services offered in your community, contact:

Practical Parent Education is a primary prevention program.



Practical Parent Education

Module 5.7

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Lesson Concepts

Defining roles in homework issues is usually the first step toward encouraging self-motivated, independent learners. When these roles become intertwined, conflict usually arises between parent and child, and perhaps even the school.

The Child's Role

- ✓ Know and understand homework policies
- ✓ Bring assignments and materials home
- ✓ Identify assignments to be completed
- ✓ Organize time and materials
- ✓ Independent completion of assignments
- ✓ Return homework to the classroom

The Parent's Role

- ✓ Provide home study environment
- ✓ Model work habits and attitudes
- ✓ Teach study skills
- ✓ Know school homework policies
- ✓ Provide encouragement
- ✓ Set limits and consequences for homework

The Teacher's Role

- ✓ Establish homework policy
- ✓ Communicate homework policy to student
- ✓ Teach study skills
- ✓ Provide meaningful homework
- ✓ Evaluate student learning
- ✓ Provide appropriate feedback

Lesson Notes

Homework Roles

The Child

- Know and understand school homework policies
- Bring assignments and materials home
- Identify assignments to be completed
- Organize time and materials
- Independent completion of assignments
- Return homework to the classroom

The Parent

- Create an environment conducive to study
- Role model appropriate study/work habits and attitudes
- Teach child specific techniques and organizational skills
- Know and understand school homework policies
- Provide encouragement
- Set limits and consequences for homework

The Teacher

- Establish homework policy
- Communicate homework policy to student
- Teach study skills
- Provide meaningful homework
- Evaluate student learning
- Provide appropriate feedback

Encouraging Young Learners

1. Be a good role model. Demonstrate daily an appreciation and enthusiasm for learning in your own life. Let your children observe you reading, balancing your checkbook, writing letters, planning the week's meals, working on the computer, and struggling with difficult projects. Family attitudes toward learning have a powerful effect on children.
2. Make reading a high priority in family life. Let children see you reading a wide variety of materials, read to them frequently, let them read to you. Have reading materials accessible in the home. Visit the library.
3. Create a positive learning environment in the home, encourage positive attitudes toward education and the school, set high expectations, within reason, for your children's accomplishments and behaviors.
4. Demonstrate an interest in your children's learning and school life by attending parent meetings, open houses, special events, parent and teacher conferences, and by volunteering in the school.
5. Use relaxed family time to talk about school. Encourage openness of feelings and ideas.
6. Be very selective in the use of television, both in regulating the time spent watching TV and the selection of programs.
7. Provide a suitable study area that is free from distractions. Encourage an occasional break during lengthy assignments or for the very young learner. A special "study snack" can make studying more pleasant.
8. Help children accept their mistakes in a way that doesn't make them feel like a failure. Help them see mistakes as a learning opportunity.
9. Acknowledge and encourage progress and effort, not just end results.
10. Involve children in the decision making process of homework—time, place, rules, consequences, etc.

Module 5.7 - Handout No. 1 (cont.)

Resolving Homework Issues

11. Let children know you are available as a resource, but avoid becoming directly involved in homework.
12. Involve yourself in study or work during homework time. It is difficult for children to be self-disciplined about study when parents are watching television or having fun.
13. Avoid questioning children too frequently about school and pointing out poor performance. This usually encourages children to become secretive about school.
14. Look for ways to ignite a spark of interest, excitement, and enthusiasm for learning. Nurture this by showing an interest in your children's curiosity and ideas. Encourage them to explore their ideas and be creative.
15. Respect and support your children's unique styles of learning.
16. When possible, spend a moment each day with your children before homework begins to go over the day's assignments and discuss what needs to be done. Many children will need help prioritizing and organizing.
17. Use words that encourage and describe very specifically children's efforts and accomplishments.
18. Be aware of the importance of healthy self-esteem in children and how it can affect learning. Help them think and feel like winners. Go over their school papers frequently. Let them point out those they are most proud of. Be sure to acknowledge any apparent improvements. Encourage them to discuss their successes and improvements.
19. Guard children's schedules carefully. Do not allow them to become overscheduled or overstressed.
20. Reinforce your love for your children each and every day.

The Homework Environment

One of the most important ways that parents can encourage academic success in children is to help them develop good study habits at home. Studying is thinking. Therefore, it is important to establish an environment and routine in the home that is conducive to concentration and good study habits. Because children have individual learning styles, consider carefully what seems to work most effectively with your child, as well as his developmental level.

1. Create a special niche for studying—a desk in the child's room, the kitchen table, wherever your child seems to be most comfortable studying and can concentrate. More important than the location itself is whether the area is free of distractions such as television, conversation, family noises, etc. Some children are comfortable with minimal background music, others are not. Studying in front of a television should not be an option.
2. The study niche should contain necessary supplies such as pencils, erasers, pencil sharpener, ruler, scissors, glue, colored pens or pencils, and other materials as needed.
3. Keep resource materials handy. Children should have easy access to a dictionary, thesaurus, globe, atlas, and encyclopedias.
4. Establish a set time for homework. Most children need time to unwind after school, however, study time should be early enough so as not to conflict with bedtime.
5. Show an interest in your children's learning. Ask open-ended questions about what they are learning in school. Ask to see papers and projects. Share with them about your work during the day as well.
6. Use daily opportunities to enrich learning—trips to the grocery store or the bank, backyard science discoveries, short excursions or vacations, etc.
7. Model enthusiasm and excitement for learning in your own daily life—read, go to the library, balance your checkbook, use the computer, etc.
8. Make reading and learning a high priority in your home.

Module 5.7 - **Handout No. 2 (cont.)**

Resolving Homework Issues

9. Create a balance in your children's daily routine—time for special interests and activities, leisure time, and time for homework.
10. Acknowledge effort and success. Let children know that you are proud of them and that mistakes are human.

Which Parent Are You?

Overly Involved Parent

- ✓ Instructs
- ✓ Hovers
- ✓ Criticizes
- ✓ Overdirects
- ✓ Corrects
- ✓ Reminds
- ✓ Nags
- ✓ Requires work to be done to parent's standard
- ✓ Demands perfection
- ✓ Worries that child will make mistakes
- ✓ Does work for child
- ✓ Makes excuses for child
- ✓ Controls
- ✓ Anxious

Child's Likely Response

- ✓ Dependent
- ✓ Manipulative
- ✓ Engages in power struggles
- ✓ Reluctant to do homework
- ✓ Poor work habits
- ✓ Low threshold of frustration
- ✓ Feels helpless, incompetent
- ✓ Lacks motivation, initiative
- ✓ Underachiever
- ✓ Blames others for own problems
- ✓ Feels guilty
- ✓ Angry

Encouraging Parent

- ✓ Perceives homework as child's responsibility
- ✓ Sets realistic expectations
- ✓ Available as a resource
- ✓ Demonstrates interest and enthusiasm
- ✓ Maintains respectable distance
- ✓ Expresses trust in child's ability
- ✓ Encourages
- ✓ Supports
- ✓ Provides brief, minimal assistance
- ✓ Allows for mistakes
- ✓ Strives to build intrinsic sense of accomplishment
- ✓ Checks intermittently on progress
- ✓ Leaves child's assignment pretty much intact so that the teacher can evaluate progress and areas for reteaching
- ✓ Models work habits and attitudes in personal life

Child's Likely Response

- ✓ Independent
- ✓ Self-directed
- ✓ Motivated
- ✓ Resourceful
- ✓ Uses parent as a resource
- ✓ Confident in abilities
- ✓ Responsible
- ✓ Sees self as capable
- ✓ Creative
- ✓ Perseveres
- ✓ Willingness to confront challenges
- ✓ Not discouraged by mistakes
- ✓ Personal pride in accomplishments
- ✓ Enjoys learning

Changing Reluctant Homework Patterns

1. Determine whether there might be special circumstances underlying homework resistance such as learning disabilities, emotional problems, lack of organizational skills, difficulties with self-discipline, or problems with peers or the school setting.
2. Set reasonable expectations for your child's study performance, but set them high enough that the child is encouraged to grow in his skills.
3. Evaluate your parental responses to the child. Are they responses that encourage or discourage your child from becoming a motivated learner?
4. Acknowledge your child's feelings and frustrations regarding homework, but let him know very emphatically that homework is his responsibility, not yours.
5. Define the boundaries of your role in homework, that of providing the right home environment, providing support and encouragement, and acting as a resource.
6. Make it clear that there are many areas of negotiation in this household, but that homework is not a negotiable item.
7. Set very clear rules regarding homework such as time, location, duration, quality, etc. Establish consequences for when these rules are not adhered to and follow through consistently.
8. To avoid the "I don't have any homework" syndrome or rushing through homework just to be done, establish a routine "study time" when the child spends a certain amount of time on learning, whether it be homework, reading a library book, or review.
9. Acknowledge and reward small steps toward improvement. Social rewards such as a hug, encouraging words, getting to choose a family activity, or having a friend over to play are often the most satisfying rewards.
10. Avoid rescuing the child from any consequences of his failure to meet homework requirements, even if it means getting a zero or going to summer school. The younger the child experiences the consequences of his behavior, the earlier the problem can be resolved.

Module 5.7 - **Handout No. 4 (cont.)**

Resolving Homework Issues

11. Maintain ongoing dialogue with the school, providing feedback and ideas. When parents and teachers work together as a team, the child is less apt to get by with inappropriate habits.
12. If changes do not occur after a reasonable amount of time and effort in applying effective parenting techniques, seek professional assistance.

Weekly Assignment Chart

My Homework Assignments					
Subject	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Reading					
Spelling					
Language					
Math					
Science					
Social Studies					
Other					
<p>Test: _____ Date: _____ (subject)</p> <p>Special Assignment: _____ Due Date: _____ (subject)</p>					

Daily Assignment Chart

My Homework			
Day _____		Name _____	
Subject	Assignment	Teacher's Signature	Parent's Signature
Reading			
Spelling			
Language			
Math			
Science			
Social Studies			
Other			
Test: _____ (subject)		Date: _____	
Special Assignment: _____ (subject)		Due Date: _____	

Zeroing in on Homework Problems

To identify problem areas in learning and homework patterns, complete the following checklist on your child.

Homework Behaviors	Never	Occasionally	Frequently
Fails to bring assignments and necessary materials home	_____	_____	_____
Unclear about homework assignments	_____	_____	_____
Denies having homework	_____	_____	_____
Resists doing homework	_____	_____	_____
Whines and complains	_____	_____	_____
Procrastinates	_____	_____	_____
Difficulty getting started	_____	_____	_____
Disorganized	_____	_____	_____
Requires constant reminding and coaxing	_____	_____	_____
Engages in power struggles	_____	_____	_____
Wants parent to do his work	_____	_____	_____
Requires constant assistance	_____	_____	_____
Tends to task only when monitored	_____	_____	_____
Easily distracted	_____	_____	_____
Daydreams	_____	_____	_____
Makes poor use of time, plays, dawdles	_____	_____	_____
Easily frustrated	_____	_____	_____
Exhibits attitude of "I can't"	_____	_____	_____
Rushes through work	_____	_____	_____
Work is careless and sloppy	_____	_____	_____

Module 5.7 - **Activity No. 1 (cont.)**
Resolving Homework Issues

Homework Behaviors	Never	Occasionally	Frequently
Takes unreasonable length of time to complete assignments	_____	_____	_____
Shows little pride in work	_____	_____	_____
More interested in completion of assignment than quality	_____	_____	_____
Responds poorly to suggestions or corrections	_____	_____	_____
Fails to return homework to school	_____	_____	_____