

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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- *Ending the Homework Hassle* by John Rosemond, Publisher: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1990

Suggested Parenting Quick Tips

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