

Triple P Tip Sheet

Elementary School Children

Homework

Children are usually expected to spend some time out of school hours doing homework and study. Expectations vary between different schools and teachers so it is important for parents to find out what is expected of their child. Parents have an important role in helping their child develop good study habits and routines. Homework time should not be a time of stress or pressure. It should be a pleasant time when parents can provide encouragement and offer help if their child needs it. This tip sheet gives some suggestions on how to help your child develop a good homework routine.

Children differ widely in their abilities and how quickly they come to understand new ideas. However, by providing children with encouragement, support and help, they are more likely to work to the best of their abilities.

WHY DO HOMEWORK PROBLEMS OCCUR?

Homework problems can arise because of poor planning, such as leaving things to the last minute. For example, some children make it hard on themselves by starting a large project the night before it is due. Some children have difficulties with homework because they do not understand the work. Some avoid homework, or do it quickly with little care, because they would rather be doing something else.

Parents may feel their child does not have a good attitude towards study or believe their child is lazy or irresponsible. This may make the problem worse.

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR HOMEWORK

▼ Let Your Child Relax After School

Children need time to relax after school, just as adults do after work. Your child may also be hungry. Offer an afternoon snack and let your child tell you about their day. If your child is in after-school care, give them time to unwind when they first arrive home.

▼ Ask Your Child About Their Homework

Find out what your child needs to do for homework and when it needs to be completed. It might involve tasks such as using a ruler, counting or sorting things, learning spelling words, writing sentences, working on a project or doing mathematics problems. Your child may have some homework-free days if they complete all their homework tasks early in the week.

▼ Set a Time for Doing Homework

Set a regular time for homework that fits with your family's schedule. You may need to fit it in around your work and your child's other commitments such as sports, clubs, music or art lessons. However, it is important that your child gets into a good study routine, and homework should have a high priority.

A good time for doing homework is immediately after children have had time to relax but before they are allowed to play or watch television. If other children come around to play, ask them to come back when your child has finished their homework. Remind your child of the ground rules — *Molly, when your homework is done you can play or watch television.*

▼ Arrange a Place To Do Homework

It is alright for children to do their homework in the family room rather than in their bedroom if they want to. However, it is best to set up a good study environment:

- Clear a space at a table.

- Make sure the room is well lit.
- Reduce distractions (although children do not need absolute quiet to work).

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO DO HOMEWORK

▼ Help Your Child Get Started

Prompt your child to get their work out and get started on the first task. Be prepared to sit at the table with your child but do not do their homework for them.

▼ Praise Your Child for Working on Their Homework

Praise can help motivate your child to persist with their homework — *Great! That's five questions you've done already.*

▼ Wait Until Your Child Asks for Help

Give your child a chance to do the work on their own before helping them.

▼ Help Your Child Solve Problems for Themselves

Prompt your child to solve problems themselves rather than giving the answer straight away. For example, if your child asks how to spell the word 'garden' without trying to spell it first, you could say — *How do you think you spell it? Get out a piece of paper and try to spell it yourself first. Then I'll come and have a look.* Offer praise when your child attempts the word. If they get the word right, offer further praise. If the word is wrong, rather than saying — *No, that's wrong* — point out the letters that are correct first — *Michael, that's nearly right. The first four letters are right. Have a look at the ending. Is it 'en' or 'on'? Yes 'en'. Excellent!*

Be careful not to overdo it. If after one prompt your child does not get the correct answer, tell them what it is. Children will become frustrated if every question they ask is met with responses such as *Look it up in the dictionary first.* You will find that your



child is more cooperative if help is given freely, with one or two prompts.

▼ Show an Interest in Your Child's Work

When children are doing their homework, they need encouragement for correct work and for attempting the task rather than criticism for making mistakes. Show an interest and praise your child for their efforts. Some children will ask whether their work is correct or want an opinion on how good the work is. Do not feel that you have to make sure your child's work is perfect before they hand it in. It can be discouraging for your child if they have worked hard on a story only to have you point out all of the spelling or punctuation mistakes. The ideas your child has expressed in their story may be very good. When checking work, say something positive about your child's effort. If you must make corrections, point out only one or two mistakes.

If messy work is a problem, encourage your child to do rough copies of work first and a final neat copy to hand in at school.

▼ Encourage Desirable Behavior

Praise and reward your child's efforts when they have finished doing their homework. Suggested rewards include allowing your child to watch television or play a special game.

KEY STEPS

- Let your child relax after school.
- Ask your child about their homework.
- Set a regular time and arrange a place to do homework.
- Help your child get started.
- Offer praise and encouragement while your child is working.
- Prompt your child to solve problems themselves.
- Show an interest and say something positive about your child's work.
- Praise and reward your child when they have finished doing their homework.

IF PROBLEMS PERSIST

Here is another strategy you can try if your child continues to experience difficulties doing their homework.

- Explain to your child that they can earn points by doing their homework. Make a list of tasks your child must do, for example, bringing home their homework notebook each day (1 point), starting their homework by 4.15 p.m. without complaining (2 points) and working on their homework without interruption for at least 15 minutes (5 points).
- Tell your child that the points can be exchanged for a daily reward or a larger reward at the end of the week. Decide how many points your child must earn to get the reward and what the reward will be. For example, if your child earns 32 points by the end of the week, they might receive some money towards a new game. Tell your child what they can earn if they reach the goal.
- Decide what you will do if your child does not do their homework. Do not do your child's homework for them. Let them experience consequences at school if their homework is not finished or done properly. You may also like to apply a consequence at home. Suitable consequences involve the loss of an activity or privilege, such as playing with friends, watching television or staying up late. Tell your child what consequences will apply if they do not do their homework.

FOR FURTHER HELP See the *Positive Parenting* booklet for more information on positive parenting strategies. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet or contact:

Triple P is a parenting program developed by Professor Matthew R. Sanders and colleagues in the Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology at The University of Queensland with funding support from Queensland Health, Victorian Department of Human Services, Health Department of Western Australia, and National Health and Medical Research Council.

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- Make a chart to keep a record of points earned. Stick the chart where it is easy for you and your child to see, such as on the refrigerator.
- Each day your child completes the tasks, put the points on their chart. Praise your child for doing their homework.
- If your child does not complete a task, do not give the points for that task for that day. Tell your child the problem and the consequence. Ignore protests or complaints. Do not debate or argue the point with your child. Simply carry out the consequence you decided on earlier. Keep to the agreement and where appropriate return the activity or privilege at the agreed time. You may need to use consequences for a number of days before your child learns to do their homework.
- At the end of the agreed time, add up the number of points your child has earned. If they have reached the goal, give them the reward.
- If your child does not reach the goal, do not give the reward. However, do not criticize them or take away points they have earned.
- When your child has reached the goal for 5 days in a row, start to phase out the rewards by making them harder to achieve, until you can take down the chart. For example, only reward your child after they have reached the goal for 2 days in a row, then increase to 3 days, then a whole week.
- Continue to use consequences consistently if your child does not do their homework.
- Continue to praise your child for doing their homework.

If problems with homework persist, discuss the problem with your child's teacher. Your child may need extra assistance in one or more subject areas. Remember that children's learning, and how well they do at school, is strongly affected by their motivation as well as their ability. One of the best ways to encourage better motivation is to focus on your child's successes — the things they do right rather than things they do wrong.

