

HOMEWORK HABITS THAT HELP

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Homework is one of those necessary evils. It reinforces the work done in class, it alerts the teacher to work that is not fully understood and it teaches independence and self discipline. Yet it is also the source of conflict and many tears in most households. For the child with learning disabilities, homework may be seen as torture, an extension of an exhausting day filled with many frustrations and failures.

Good study habits are the foundations for successful work habits as an adult, so it is important to develop a positive attitude and build good habits early in your child's school life. Here are some tips to reduce tension around homework.

DISCUSSION WITH TEACHER

- Discuss your child's homework problems with her teacher and find out what the teacher's expectations are of your child – perhaps the homework can be adjusted (*not* scrapped!) to suit her abilities.
- It is important to develop a good line of communication with the teacher. Let the teacher know that you are willing to be involved in helping your child and would like to be kept informed of your child's progress or any problems which arise.
- Find out if the teacher is aware of your child's learning disabilities, if she is making any accommodations for homework tasks.
- Find out what the teacher's homework policy is and just how involved you should be in monitoring the homework.
- Find out how much time per day your child is expected to spend on homework and what you should do if she cannot finish within the expected time.
- Make regular appointments with the teacher to get and give feedback on how things are going at school and at home. Perhaps some ideas are not working

and need to be reviewed or perhaps homework sessions are going well and your child is ready for a new challenge.

DESIGNATED WORKSPACE AND TIME

- Establish a routine around homework. Ideally a designated place and time that suits your child and you should be adhered to as much as possible. There will be times when the schedule or location has to change, and it's all right to be flexible when necessary. But it's worth bearing in mind that LD children work best when structure and routine are in place.
- Decide on a suitable time with your child. The best time is not right after school. He should first unwind and have a snack before settling down to homework.
- A good idea is for all siblings involved with homework or studying to be working at the same time. This creates a quiet atmosphere of productivity and organization. It also means that one child is not watching TV or playing while the other has to study.
- Younger children should try and complete their homework in the afternoon before they are too tired to concentrate well, while older children are usually able to continue working for a while after dinner.
- Encourage your child to work at a table, perhaps a desk in his bedroom, or the kitchen or dining room table. This promotes an appropriate writing posture, and helps to keep his work neat and his workspace organized.
- Ensure that the chair and table are the right size for him. If they're not, he will be uncomfortable causing him to tire more quickly, fidget more often and his concentration will be broken more frequently.
- Keep his workspace as uncluttered as possible.
- Ensure that there is adequate lighting and ventilation.
- Even if there is no homework for the afternoon, he should be encouraged to spend the designated time either working on an upcoming assignment, going through the day's work or even just reading.

SUPPLIES

- Encourage her to take responsibility for her supplies: to let you know in advance when items need replacing; to ensure that her supplies are kept together and not scattered all over the house.
- Make sure that all necessary items are available before she starts her homework – calculator, books, pens, coloring pencils, correct books, etc.
- Keep a dictionary available and encourage her to refer to it often – she will need to have developed this skill for the higher classes at school.

ENVIRONMENT

- Ensure that the environment is conducive to your child being able to concentrate well. This means that as many distractions as possible must be eliminated.
- Turn off the TV and don't allow telephone calls until he has finished his homework.
- Encourage other members of the family to respect his need for quiet and calmness in the house in order for him to work to the best of his ability.
- Some children concentrate better with background music, but make sure it is in the background.

ORGANISATION

- Encourage the use of a homework diary. Your child must record, in as much detail as possible, the homework for the day, upcoming tests and exams and due dates for projects.
- Lessen the load of the afternoon's homework and divide it into manageable chunks.
- Some children prefer to finish the easy tasks first, before tackling the difficult ones; others prefer to work the other way around. However, it's a good idea to balance the work – not to start with the longest or most difficult task, as this will demoralize and frustrate her and set the tone for afternoon ahead, and not

to end with these tasks, as she will be tired and not able to give it her best effort.

- Help her prioritize the work for the afternoon by numbering the tasks in the order in which they are to be done. Ticking off completed tasks puts the end in sight and gives a lovely feeling of accomplishment.
- Keep a large wall calendar above her desk or on the refrigerator. Help her keep track of important dates for projects, tests and exams, extracurricular activities, birthdays, social events and so on.
- Dates for projects, tests and exams are usually given well in advance – help her plan the workload and set aside time to do a little bit each day.
- Encourage her to organize her school bag when she has finished her homework, ready for the following day. This will ensure that books or stationery items are not left at home, that notes to the teacher are signed or written, that sports equipment are not forgotten, e.g. the tennis racquet.

BREAKS

- Concentration depends on your child's developmental level – first graders are unlikely to last for more than 15 minutes on a task while high school children can focus effectively for up to an hour, sometimes longer.
- Allowing breaks in between each task will enable your child to refresh and come back to his homework with more energy.
- It is better to have frequent short breaks, depending on how much time is available. Breaks should include physical movements like walking or playing outside, having a snack, or even engaging in a conversation with you.
- Watching TV should not be considered as taking a break.

MONITOR THE TIME

- LD children usually struggle with time management and can spend hours on the smallest of tasks. If your child is spending an excessively large amount of time on homework, you need to discuss this problem with the teacher.

- One way of encouraging her to work at a faster pace is to set a time limit for each task and use a timer. When the time is up, reward her if the task is finished. If she is still busy but runs out of time, stop the task, and write a note to the teacher.
- Do not compromise quality of work for quantity. For example, it is far more valuable for her to have successfully calculated 5 sums in Math than completed all 10 but got most of them wrong.

MOTIVATION

- Help your child set *realistic and attainable* goals for himself. If he is studying for a test, ask him what result he thinks he can achieve. Make sure that his goal is within his reach, that he will easily be able to achieve it. As he becomes more confident in his abilities and experiences success in the goals he sets, he will gradually extend himself and set higher goals.
- Together, decide on a reward and then help him work towards his goal. Rewards don't have to be material – extra TV time, cook his favorite meal for dinner, an afternoon at the park, etc.
- Goals need not only be limited to tests and exams, but can be set for individual homework tasks as well. For example to finish a task within a set time, to learn all his spelling words by Friday, to write as neatly as possible for the whole week, to get a smiley face for a task from the teacher, and so on.

ENCOURAGEMENT

- Give lots of praise, noticing even the smallest effort, letting her know that you're proud of her for trying.
- Acknowledge the difficulties she experiences with, for example, Math, and sympathize with her, but let her know that you have confidence in her determination to overcome her problems. Make sure she knows that you're available to help her when she needs you.

- Brag about her and comment on her progress to others, when she is within earshot. This will boost her self-esteem enormously and motivate her to keep doing her best.
- Show an interest in her tasks and ask her questions about her work, discuss likes and dislikes, problems and achievements.
- Younger children often like someone to be in the room with them when working on their homework. Be close at hand and available to help when needed.

And lastly, remember the aims of assigning homework tasks. By encouraging your child to work to the best of her ability on her homework, you are helping her to develop independence, self discipline and a good work ethic. But *she* must take responsibility for her homework. *Do not do the work for your child.* She may need your assistance and guidance, but she does not need *your* homework.

These ideas for homework are of a general nature and suggest a standard conducive to developing good study habits in all children. But children are individuals who experience problems specific to their own situation, and while these suggestions might be helpful, they might not deal with specific difficulties *your child* has. For more individual help with your child's particular problem, contact our Remedial Therapist.