

Making the grade: Tips on how parents can help make homework time more productive

14 August 2012, By Beth Bohn

Homework may be the last thing your child wants to do, but a Kansas State University education expert says encouraging the habit of homework is important.

Laurie Curtis, assistant professor of [curriculum](#) and instruction at the College of Education, said doing homework helps children learn how to prioritize tasks and helps develop self-discipline.

"Homework leads children toward a path of independence," said Curtis, a former elementary school teacher. "The important thing to remember is that the type of work the [child](#) is doing must be appropriate. Homework should not require the child to struggle through something brand new with an expectation that a parent will teach a child a concept. It should be a time for a child to practice something he or she understands conceptually in order for it to be done with more ease and accuracy."

To keep children on track when doing homework, it's beneficial for them to find a quiet place equipped with the tools needed and to have access to a parent or older [sibling](#) in case questions arise. Curtis also recommends parents attend back-to-school orientations where teachers often explain their homework policy, and it's important to read classroom newsletters for information about work being done in the class.

Curtis said many issues can affect a child's ability to successfully complete homework, including being tired, hungry, frustrated by the difficulty of the work, or being distracted by the fun somebody may be having in the next room.

"It is really critical that homework is not seen as punishment or something that you have to do instead of having fun," she said. "Families may even consider establishing a quiet time where everybody is reading or doing work of some kind during a brief time each evening."

But if a child continually struggles with homework, Curtis said parents should never hesitate to talk to the child's teacher.

Sometimes parents can provide too much help.

"It's important that parents do not do a child's project or homework because the one doing the work is the one learning," Curtis said. "The only lesson learned by a parent doing a child's work is that the child loses confidence in his or her own abilities to independently complete the task assigned. While the grade might be better in the short term due to a parent's professional touch, the child will know that that grade was not earned through his or her own efforts -- even at a young age."

If asked, giving suggestions is fine, but Curtis said parents shouldn't take over. Allowing the child to maintain ownership of the work at all times is important.

To maintain a child's positive attitude about homework, parents might want to refrain from questioning a child about assigned homework first thing each night.

"I think it's more important that a parent first ask what new ideas the child heard about, what good book he or she heard about in the library, etc., before the homework question is asked," Curtis said. "It establishes a more positive tone about school. Rather than asking that yes/no question about having any homework, perhaps asking, 'What do you need to do to get ready for tomorrow at school,' might cause a child to think about assigned homework bit more."

Many classroom teachers and school districts use agendas or journals where children can record necessary tasks to be done at home. Curtis said parents can use these as a way to communicate back and forth with the teacher as well.

"These can facilitate good home-school communication," she said. "Many districts today also use parent portals or Web-based communication through the school district that allow parents to view grades, homework assignments, work that has not been turned in and upcoming events for students to prepare for."

When it comes to older children and homework, Curtis said that [parents](#) shouldn't be surprised if their kids are spending more time online. She said a growing trend is a model of instruction called the flipped classroom.

"The flipped classroom is the concept of students gaining content information through online or other forms of information acquisition while at home prior to the classroom period, and then using the classroom period to have the teacher expand on the information and do collaborative activities when face-to-face," she said. "Much of the teaching is done via technology in the home environment. This could certainly change the definition we have of [homework](#)."

Provided by Kansas State University

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