

How to Get Your Kids to Do Their Homework

Parents around the world would love the magic formula to encourage kids to do their homework! Alas, it's not as simple as waving a wand, but there are some methods for encouraging your kids to develop and stick to a regular homework routine. For some parents, effective encouragement to get your kids to do their homework will also be about changing your own approaches to homework enforcement. Don't worry, it's not hard, it's just about taking a moment to work it through.

1. Understand the benefits of homework. If you're not convinced that homework matters, it will be even harder to convince your kids. There are some good reasons behind a moderate amount of homework:

- Homework reinforces learning taught during the day. Some learning won't stick as well unless kids give it more practice and the classroom environment isn't necessarily going to provide adequate time for more practice. This is of special importance for **math** and **critical thinking skills**.^[1]
- Sometimes homework teaches additional skills not taught at school due to lack of time or resources. This is a "broadening" learning effect of homework.^[2]
- Homework instills **self-discipline**, teaching **time management**, organizational skills, concentration skills, and self-responsibility.^[3] Self-discipline is a key life skill that can only be learned in the doing.

2. Make peace with the reality that most kids don't like doing homework. When there are many other infinitely more interesting things happening, especially in our electronic gadget age, it's hard to make homework appealing, so stop trying. As a parent, guardian, or other person responsible for getting kids to do homework, acceptance isn't about agreement with them. It's about understanding and infusing the rest of your approach with that understanding, while remaining prepared to **set the boundaries** and stand by your expectations that they will do it.

3. Be a facilitator rather than a force to be reckoned with. You can cajole, plead, yell, threaten, bribe, and jump up and down with your face turning blue but none of this negative and mutually exhausting behavior will *make* your kids do anything. Sure, they'll respond to immediate threats of withdrawing privileges and you standing over them until it's done, but this will not turn into reformed homework behavior, and who has time to stand over them instead of getting other tasks done? Instead, aim to facilitate the homework process as much as possible:

- Provide a distinct, comfortable, well-lit, quiet, and non-distracting place for the homework to be completed.^[4] Somewhere away from electronic items, pedestrian traffic, and other kids playing is ideal.
- Ensure that your child has everything needed to do homework, from pens and paper, to a **laptop** and books, calculator or phone with a calculator and be sure to get special project materials in advance, to avoid the excuse of "I don't have what I need".^[5] Take a moment to sit down with them when they start homework to see what else they might need, including bookmarking quality kids' information websites they can use as part of their **homework research** tools, such as the US Kids.gov site,^[6] and an online dictionary.
- Invite or encourage your child to keep you informed about homework progress and any interesting facts that arise out of it.

4. **Discuss homework** with your kids in a direct and enabling manner. At the beginning of each term or semester, sit down and talk about how your kid intends to handle homework in the coming months. In this way, you set mutually shared ground rules for getting homework done, ground rules that you can call on to remind them when they're slipping, or to praise them for when they're meeting them.

- **Empower your kids.** Rather than setting the time for homework, have a family meeting to discuss possible times. Let the kids feel they're somewhat in charge by giving them the choice of when to do their homework—before dinner, after dinner, or half before and half after. The only rider on this is to refuse to allow homework to be left until just before bedtime – set an agreed cut-off point by which time homework must be completed; this can be sweetened by making allowance for fun reading time, or other enjoyable wind-down activity prior to bedtime. And you can help by keeping the evening mealtime as regular as possible.

- Find out if there are specific areas of homework they're having difficulties with. Ask them if they would like to consider having more hands-on help with those issues (you, a sibling, or a tutor, for example). Sometimes homework isn't working because they're struggling with it in class, as well as, out of class.
- Help your child figure out what is hard homework and what is easy homework. Having your child do the hard work first will mean he is most alert when facing the biggest challenges. The easier material will seem to go faster once fatigue begins to set in.
- Agree on homework free times, such as parts of the weekend, or Friday nights, etc., and allow them to plan how they use this free time.

5. Use praise to achieve intrinsic motivation. Praising work done well and ignoring or downplaying poor performance is an approach that will enthruse your kid a lot more than focusing on the negatives, and it helps to remove the tension for you, along with any inclination to tear your hair out.

- Be careful when using rewards to spur homework completion. The aim is to rely principally on intrinsic motivators (fostering satisfaction at a job completed) rather than material rewards. Bribing is the ultimate demotivating strategy because any kid who associates completing homework with a new DS game or an allowance increase learns to do the activity for material gain rather than internal gratification, or for greater understanding. Occasional rewards for a special project done really well can be a great boost but regular material rewards are best avoided.
- Reward homework with exciting games and/or toys completed with praise, including informing your kid that you are really proud of her for being organized/timely/proactive, etc. It is important to define the exact reason why you are proud of your kid, so that she knows what to keep up. The idea is to "catch them doing something good" and keep noticing the good.^[7]
- Ignore poor behavior. When your kids don't achieve what they need to, avoid a yelling match. Keep your message simple, reminding your kids what you have agreed upon together when discussing how they'd approach homework and expressing both disappointment and a hope to see things return to normal the next day.

- Keep real rewards simple, such as a [walk to the park](#), a [pizza](#) dinner, spending time playing a game with your kid that you usually find too hard for you, going to the [zoo](#), etc. This way you remain involved, your child links good performance with spending more fun time with you, and having fun as a family.

6. Shift the responsibility from you to your child. This may feel really hard for you, especially in a time when parents feel a sense of self-responsibility about homework, but it's absolutely vital that your child learns as early as possible that the consequences for not completing homework rest on them, not on you. Don't carry the weight of your child's unwillingness to complete homework on your shoulders; provided you are giving them a supportive and caring structured environment, and you've defined daily homework times, homework not completed is your child's lesson in learning about **self-responsibility**.^[8] After a few times of learning first hand the consequences of not completing homework, your child will soon start to see that he or she has responsibility in this matter. This is *not* the same as not caring at all. It is about taking a conscious approach to letting your kids learn to be responsible.

7. Let the kids deal with the consequences of not doing their homework. Teachers are usually not very happy with students if they don't do homework. If your child flat-out refuses to do their work, then let them see what their teacher does the next day. They probably will do their homework after that!

- Naturally, if you have a child with learning or other disabilities, you may need to vary this more hands-off approach. However, don't be afraid to seek support from professional people skilled in your child's particular disability; getting help is important when you don't know what else to do.