

How to Help With Homework Without Hovering by Jessica Lahey

My sons, sixteen and eleven, are well acquainted with the daily grind of homework. They each have their own routines and habits for completing it, but neither of them are particularly happy about having to engage in academic work at home when they would rather be out playing or hanging with friends. While the debate rages in the media about the purpose and value of homework in the American educational system, it remains a reality for most children.

My sons have not always viewed homework as a necessary evil. Long ago, during in their first years in elementary school, homework assignments were much more than photocopied handouts. They were a badge of honor, a tangible sign that they were entering the ranks of the “big kids.”

Take advantage of this enthusiasm while it lasts. These first homework assignments, like early household duties, are a fantastic opportunity to instill positive attitudes and habits, even in the face of our society’s misplaced values around education.

We value the products of education over the process of learning. We worship grades over knowledge, points over perseverance. Consequently, it falls to parents to make home a place where learning, and the effort that goes in to working through a difficult intellectual or emotional challenge is honored as much, if not more, than those grades, points and scores.

The first step for parents, particularly during those first early years, when enthusiasm and motivation is high, is to support, but not meddle, in our children’s school work. Which is more important, that each individual homework assignment is picture-perfect and 100 percent correct, or to teach your child how to become autonomous and competent enough to complete and remember to hand in homework on his or her own?

It’s easy to focus on the less relevant short term goals: the assignment due tomorrow, the perfect score desired today, the magazine-ready science poster you could so easily ensure that your child hands in given some adult help and a couple of hundred reminders. I get it, believe me. Nothing warms the cockles of my perfectionist teacher and parent heart more than meticulously-printed index cards glued symmetrically to an immaculate sheet of poster board.

When that first homework assignment comes home in a backpack, stay focused on those long-term goals and remember: when it comes to homework, our job is to support, encourage and redirect.

SUPPORT

Support implies that we are present, but not hovering. Nearby, but not intrusive. Doing our own thing while they do theirs. When parents hover over kids, we imply that we will be there immediately with advice or help, maybe even before they have to ask for it. When we step back, and show that we have our own work to do and our own interests, we signal that we trust them to do their work on their own, without our constant prodding and nagging.



ENCOURAGE

Every kid, no matter how gifted, no matter how brilliant, will eventually need help, and when that moment arrives, parents should aim to encourage, not rescue. A call for help with homework is not a signal to take hold of the pencil or solve the problem; it's an opportunity to teach that child how to approach the problem or the misunderstanding from another direction.

As psychologist, author, and school counselor Michael Thompson suggests in his book, *The Pressured Child*, "Children need us to recognize their struggle and pay attention to it. That doesn't mean to intervene immediately or to start yelling or panicking, or to come to a premature conclusion." When we do intervene, we communicate to our children that we don't trust them, and that we don't believe that they are competent enough to handle the problem themselves. When we encourage them to keep trying, to push through frustration to learning, we implicitly tell them that we know they can succeed and have the tools to persevere.

REDIRECTION

Frustrated kids are not hopeless kids; often, all they need is a redirection – a leading question that reveals an error in thinking or the repetition of a direction in order to bring the problem into sharper focus. When we redirect, rather than save our kids when they get stuck, we teach them that they can succeed eventually, given some persistence and fortitude. Even better, we raise the odds that they will be able to redirect themselves the next time around.

This is, after all, our job. Not to eliminate all frustration from our children's lives, but to show them how to cope with it when they inevitably face it. It's our job to give them the tools, techniques and tricks they will need to succeed on their own, without our help. It's so much easier to establish these priorities from the beginning, in the context of elementary school worksheets and addition flashcards, rather than later on, when increased difficulty and higher academic and emotional stakes can distract everyone from these long-term goals.

When homework time gets frustrating for everyone, and you are tempted to prioritize your child's short-term happiness over their long-term competence, remember: parenting is a long-haul job. We owe it to our kids to take every opportunity to show them that grades, scores and points are not the final destination. Any kid can learn how to play that game. No, we expect more.

We expect them to *learn*.

(<http://www.pbs.org/parents/expert-tips-advice/2015/09/help-homework-without-hovering/>)



BMS Homework Help Tips for Success

At Basalt Middle School, we expect that all assigned work is turned in, even if late. Students are responsible for what has been assigned. We offer free Homework Help classes four days a week. (See the BMS website for the schedule).

WHY HOMEWORK?

When your student asks why he/she has to do homework, it can be for one of several reasons:

- To practice skills for memory (math facts, spelling words, vocabulary)
- For reading fluency-- the more you read, the faster you read with better comprehension
- For review of a skill that was recently taught but not yet mastered
- To complete an assignment or project not finished during school work time

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH HOMEWORK:

- Help your child set up a consistent, organized place for homework that is free of distractions like television.
- Help your child establish a consistent daily schedule for homework completion. For some that may be directly after school. Others may need a break first.
- Check planner to ensure student is recording assignments correctly and bringing the right work home.
- Place yourself physically away from the child when they master a concept. They need to feel the accomplishment of the 'aha, I got it!' times themselves not attribute it to an adult helper. This builds independence.
- Only help when the student wants the help and never do the work for them. Student should hold the pencil 99% of the time.
- Get curious about your child's work through questioning: How did you figure that out? What's another way you could have done that? How many times did you try before it turned out right? What here was challenging and how did you figure it out? What do you plan to do next time?
- Help your child work through frustration or a negative attitude when the work is difficult: Encourage your child to ask for help when stuck. Ask how they might go about a problem differently to solve it. Model growth mindset language such as, "you haven't mastered this--yet" (When you hear "I can't...") or "it's okay to make mistakes-- that's part of the learning process" or "I admire your persistence and the way you're tackling this challenge even though it's hard."
- When your child has worked hard but cannot complete the assignment in a reasonable amount of time, have the child email his/her teacher or help him/her write a note.

WHEN SHOULD PARENTS CONTACT A TEACHER:

Always encourage students to contact the teacher themselves first for help. However, please reach out to a teacher if:

- You notice that your child is consistently unable to talk about what knowledge he/she is practicing or using.



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- If there is something that comes up that prevents your child from completing homework-- a simple note to the teacher is helpful.
- If your student has not been doing any homework, has a blank planner, or says he/she's regularly finished it all at school.

LATE, MISSING, FORGOTTEN HOMEWORK:

Missing work can impact a student's eligibility for sports and Habits of a Scholar grades on the report card, HOWEVER we encourage parents not to rescue their student either by doing work for them or bringing work to school when it's left at home-- this is a great learning opportunity and lesson in responsibility and independence for your child.

- Parents will be notified weekly with a Robocall if students are on the Missing Work list. Parents should encourage students to check in with a teacher to make up the work.
- Teachers are often available in the mornings, after school, and during lunch time for help. Students should talk to their teacher to arrange a good time to come in and get help. Teachers always appreciate a student who is willing to show effort, seek help, and stick with a tough assignment.