

# How a parent can help... ...with homework

By Christina Giessen-Hood

Educational Psychologist for Kindergarten and Primary School

## *The role of the parent*

- Setting goals and structuring the work with the child
- Monitoring the work
- To be present
- To create a positive attitude towards homework by showing interest and enthusiasm, encouraging the child and giving plenty of positive feedback. Negative attitudes on the part of parents can destroy a child's confidence (*"Bill, I'm concerned about your reading. I feel embarrassed when your teacher keeps on complaining that you are not making any progress. Reading is important and you are lazy about it. You can do much better if only you tried."*)
- To encourage independence: Avoid doing work for the child
- To help the child understand work that has not been properly consolidated or understood in class. It is not the task of the parent to teach the child new work.



## *General tips when helping a child to understand his work*

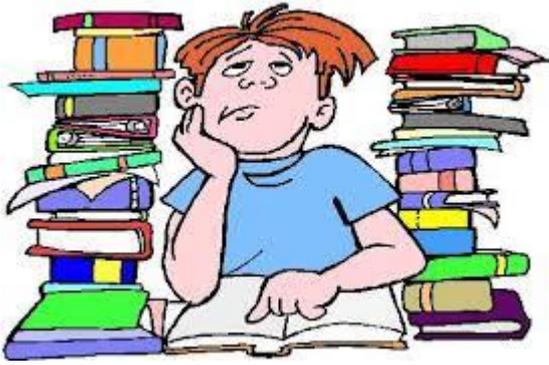
- Listen carefully to the child in order to understand what he understands, what not, to respect his pace and how he feels about the work.
- Sit next to him so that both can see the work
- Give short, simple, clear directions
- Teach in small steps and set small goals
- Make eye contact when speaking to him
- Make the teaching enjoyable, introduce a fun element
- Use drawings and concrete materials to help you teach
- Praise what is correct and well understood, do not criticize what is wrong
- Monitor your own tutoring (am I using too many words to explain things? Am I asking too many questions? Am I asking my child to explain his own thinking? Is my tone of voice calm, relaxed and accepting? Do I frequently give praise or make positive encouraging statements? Am I enjoying this interaction with my child? Is my child being helped by this interaction?)

## *Verbal feedback*

- Give praise frequently
- Be honest and precise ("you answered that question very well")
- If an answer is incomplete, praise the correct part and restate the question
- If an answer is wrong, give additional help and clues, then praise the correct answer

## *Why some children struggle to do homework*

- Learning problem, ADHD, visual, auditory, memory
- Not paying attention in class (discuss with teacher)
- Homework to receive negative attention
- Teacher assigning work not taught in class
- Assignment unclear, unfair without purpose



## Why some children resist having to do homework

- Work of no interest to child
- Time allotted may be inappropriate (before supper, when both parents and child are exhausted)
- No sufficient parental supervision or control (too much TV)
- Work too hard, too much
- Parent's attitude too negative, punitive
- Child may be lazy (homework diary, home privileges withheld until homework is done)

## A homework schedule

- Provides structure, consistency, security, eliminates conflict between parent and child, encourages studying at set times / study habits
- Children need to unwind after school but shouldn't be allowed to wait until it's so late & they're tired
- Children study better after they have had a healthy snack - no sugar or other stimulants
- Encourage brief exercises in between (children find it difficult to sit still for extended periods of time)
- Planning homework: Most difficult work should be done first. Memorizing of information should be done while the child's mind is fresh.

## The child's study centre

- Lighting
- Writing area with minimum distractions
- Chair with straight back for written work
- Noise at a level that the child can handle
- DO NOT DISTURB made by the child himself
- Study centre is off limits to non-studying family members or friends

## Study material

- Child should get together all the required materials for that day's homework. If she/he has not written down homework it is her/his responsibility to contact he/his teacher or a reliable class friend. Otherwise she/he has to take consequences the next day.

## Learning stages

- The exposure stage (encounters concepts and procedures for the first time) (mostly at school)
- The guided stage (child needs help & guidance) (at school and at home) (children with difficulties need more help)
- The independent stage (work is beginning to feel easy, child gains confidence) (homework)
- The mastery stage (child learns to do work thoroughly and completely, can perform it for the rest of his life without help, clues or input from others).
- Parents have to be careful not to encourage children to get stuck on the guided stage, results in learned helplessness.



**Coming soon in Cup of Concrete:** *How a parent can help with specific subjects*