



NORD ANGLIA INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL HONG KONG
A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

Homework and Effective Parenting



HOMWORK: A CONCERN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES, U.K.

The following is adapted from a book called 'Helping your children with homework' by Nancy Paulu, funded by the Education Department.

Families play a vital role in educating their children. What families do is more important to student success than whether they are rich or poor, whether parents have finished high school or not, or whether children are in Primary or Secondary School.

Every school will try promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

As the handbook points out, we know that children who spend more time on homework, on average, do better in school, and that the academic benefits increase as children move into the upper years of School.

But the value of homework extends beyond school. We know that good assignments, completed successfully, can help children develop wholesome habits and attitudes. Homework can help parents learn about their children's education and communicate both with their children and the schools. And it can encourage a lifelong love of learning.

In addition to helping with homework, there are many other important ways that parents can help their children learn. Parents can encourage children to spend more leisure time reading than watching television. They can talk with their children and communicate positive behaviours, values, and character traits. They can keep in touch with the school. And they can express high expectations for children and encourage their efforts to achieve.

Some ideas of how to support your child with homework

“Homework is an opportunity for students to learn and for parents to be involved in their children's education. A parent's interest can spark enthusiasm in a child and help teach the most important lesson of all--that learning can be fun and is well worth the effort.”



However, helping your child with homework isn't always easy. At PTA meetings and at parent evenings, parents often ask:

- How can I get Michael to do his homework? Every night it's a struggle to get him to turn off the television and do his homework.
- Why isn't Rohan getting more homework? (Why is Davis getting so much homework?)
- When is Tara supposed to do homework? She takes piano lessons, sings in the choir, plays basketball, and helps with jobs around the house. There's hardly any time left to study.
- How can I help Prim with her maths homework when I don't understand it?
- Do homework tasks really help my child learn?

It is hoped this booklet will help answer these questions--and many others--that parents and others who care for children in Primary and Secondary School often ask about homework. Included are practical ideas for helping children complete homework assignments successfully. Some of the ideas in this booklet may also be helpful for Secondary students.

THE BASICS

Before discussing ways you can help your child with homework, it is important to discuss why teachers assign homework and how it benefits your child.

WHY DO TEACHERS ASSIGN HOMEWORK?

Homework is seen as one of the principal ways in which pupil achievement can be raised.

The benefits of doing homework must be instilled at an early age in all pupils, so that independent home study becomes routine. The aim of homework is to:

- enable pupils to understand that independent learning is vital to achieving success;
- give every pupil the opportunity to fulfil their potential;
- instil in all pupils the importance of life-long learning;
- provide training for students in planning & organising time; and
- promote a responsibility for learning within each pupil.

Homework can also help children develop good habits and attitudes.

It can teach children to work independently; encourage self-discipline and responsibility (homework tasks provide some youngsters with their first chance to manage time and meet deadlines); and encourage a love of learning.

Homework can also bring parents and educators closer together. Parents who supervise homework and work with their

children on tasks learn about their children's education and about the school.

Homework is meant to be a positive experience and to encourage children to learn. Homework tasks should not be used as punishment.

In summary, the purpose of homework is to:

- to encourage and develop self-discipline, study habits and a range of skills in planning and organising time;
- to allow reinforcing, extending and consolidating of work done in class;
- to give pupils experience of working on their own, and to develop in pupils a sense of responsibility and commitment to their own learning;
- to involve parents/carers as partners in education;
- to prepare for test/examinations
- to further challenge and extend gifted and talented children; and
- to provide focused and sustained support for less able pupils.



DOES HOMEWORK HELP CHILDREN LEARN?

Homework helps your child achieve higher in school when tasks are meaningful, are completed successfully, and are returned with constructive comments from the teacher. A homework task should have a specific purpose, come with clear instructions, be fairly well-matched to a student's abilities, and designed to help develop a student's knowledge and skills.

In the early Primary Years, homework can help children develop the habits and attitudes described earlier. From early on in Primary, small amounts of homework, gradually increased each year, may support improved academic achievement. In Year 6 and beyond, students who complete more homework and revision perform better on standardised tests, on average, than students who do less homework. The difference in performance between students who do more homework and those who do less increases as children move up through the Year groups.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF HOMEWORK?

Many educators believe that homework is most effective for the majority of children in early Primary years when it does not exceed 20 minutes each school day. From Years 4-6, many educators recommend from 20 to 40 minutes a school day for most students. For Secondary students, generally, up to 2 hours a school day is thought to be suitable.

Amounts that vary from these guidelines are fine for some students. Talk with your child's teacher if you are concerned about either too much or too little homework. Remember there has to be a consistent amount for the class and year group.

HOW TO HELP: SHOW YOU THINK EDUCATION AND HOMEWORK ARE IMPORTANT



Children need to know that their parents and adults close to them think homework is important. If they know their parents care, children have a good reason to complete their homework and hand it in on time. There is a lot that you can do to show that you value education and homework.

SET A REGULAR TIME.

Finding a regular time for homework helps children finish tasks. The best schedule is one that works for your child and your family. What works well in one household may not work in another. Of course, a good schedule depends in part on your child's age, as well as individual needs. For instance, one child may work best in the afternoon after an hour of play, and another may be more efficient after dinner (although late at night, when children are tired, is seldom a good time).

Outside activities, such as sports or music lessons, may mean that you need a flexible schedule. Your child may study after school on some days and in the evening on others. If there isn't enough time to finish homework, your child may need to drop some activities to ensure they are not over doing it! Homework must be a high priority.

You'll need to work with your child to develop a schedule. An older student can probably make up a schedule independently, although you'll want to make sure it's a good one.

It may help to write out the schedule and put it in a place where you'll see it often, such as the fridge door or their own study area.

Some families have a required amount of time that children must devote to homework or some other learning activity each school night (the length of time can vary depending upon the child's age). For instance, if your Year 6 child knows she's expected to spend an hour doing homework, reading, or researching on the internet, she may be less likely to rush through her homework so that she can watch television. A required amount of time may also discourage her from

"forgetting" to bring home homework and help her adjust to a routine.

PICK A PLACE.

A study area should be well-lit, resources close by, and be fairly quiet.

A study area doesn't have to be fancy. A desk in the bedroom is nice, but for many the kitchen table or a corner of the living room works just fine.

Your child may enjoy decorating a special study corner. A plant, a brightly coloured container to hold pencils, and some favourite artwork taped to the walls can make study time more pleasant.

REMOVE DISTRACTIONS.

Turn off the television and discourage social telephone calls during homework time. (A call to a classmate about a homework task may, however, be helpful.)

Some children work well with quiet background music, but loud noise from the T.V. is not OK.

If you live in a small or noisy household, try having all family members take part in a quiet activity during homework time. You may need to take a noisy toddler outside or into another room to play. If distractions can't be avoided, your child may want to complete homework in a nearby place where it is quiet and supportive to learning.

HOW TO HELP: MONITOR HOMEWORK

Children are more likely to complete their homework successfully when parents monitor homework. How closely you need to monitor depends upon the age of your child, how independent she is, and how well she does in school. Whatever the age of your child, if assignments are not getting done satisfactorily, more supervision is needed.

Here are some good ways to monitor homework:

ASK ABOUT THE SCHOOL'S HOMEWORK POLICY.

At the start of the school year, ask the teacher:

- What kinds of homework will be given?
- How long are children expected to take to complete it?
- How does the teacher want you to be involved?

Teachers' expectations vary. Ask your child's teacher what you should do. Should you just check to make sure the homework is done, or should you do something more? Some teachers want parents to go over the homework and point out errors, while others ask parents to simply check to make sure the homework is completed.

It's also a good idea to ask the teacher to call you if any problems with homework come up.

BE AVAILABLE.

Primary school children often like to have someone in the same room when working on their homework in case they have questions. If your child will be cared for by someone else, talk to that person about what you expect regarding homework.

LOOK OVER COMPLETED HOMEWORK.

It's usually a good idea to check to see that your Primary school child has finished her homework. If you're not there when the homework is finished, look at it when you get home. After the teacher returns completed homework, read the comments to see if your child has done the work satisfactorily.

MONITOR TELEVISION VIEWING AND GAME PLAYING.

Children on average spend far more time watching television than they do completing homework. In many homes, more homework gets done when television time is limited. Once you and your child have worked out a homework schedule, take time to discuss how much television and what programmes she can watch. It's worth noting that television can be a learning tool. Look for programmes that relate to what your child is studying in school, such as programmes on history or science or film based on famous children's literature. When you can, watch shows with your child, discuss them, and encourage follow-up activities such as reading or a trip to the museum.

IDENTIFY AND PROVIDE RESOURCES.

For starters, collect: pencils, pens, rubbers, writing paper, their homework book, a dictionary and a thesaurus. Other things that might be helpful include: glue, a stapler, paper clips, maps, a calculator, a pencil sharpener, tape, scissors, a ruler, and a computer. Keep these items together in one place if possible. If you can't provide your child with needed supplies, check with the teacher about possible sources of assistance. Some internet tasks etc can be done and printed off in school during playtimes.

For books and other information resources, check with the school. The School library has work stations designed especially to assist children with school work. The library also is open to children during lunch and after school.

These days many schools have computers in classrooms, and many households have personal computers. However, you don't have to have a computer in your home in order for your child to complete homework successfully.

You may want to ask the teacher to explain school policy about the use of computers-- or any special equipment--for homework. Certainly, computers can be a great learning tool and helpful for some tasks. They can be used for word processing and on-line reference resources, as well as educational programs and games to sharpen skills. Some schools may offer after-school programs where your child can use the school computers. However try to ensure your child is not simply copying information for their homework. Teachers will want to see elements of the children's own work and wording.

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE.

Children are more likely to study if they see you reading, writing, and doing things that require thought and effort on your part. Talk with your child about what you're reading and writing even if it's something as simple as making a shopping list. Tell them about what you do at work. Encourage activities that support learning--for example, educational games, library visits, walks in the park, trips to the zoo or museums, and jobs that teach a sense of responsibility.

SHOW AN INTEREST.

Make time to take your child to the library to check out materials needed for homework (and for fun too), and read with your child as often as you can. Talk about school and learning activities in family conversations. Ask your child what was discussed in class that day. If he doesn't have much to say, try another approach. For example, ask your child to read aloud a story he wrote or discuss the results of a science experiment.

Another good way to show your interest is to attend school activities, shows, and sports events. If you can, volunteer to help in the classroom or at special events. Getting to know some classmates and other parents not only shows you're interested but helps build a network of support for you and your child.

HOW TO HELP: PROVIDE GUIDANCE



The basic rule is, "Don't do the homework yourself." It's not your homework--it's your child's. Doing homework for your child won't help him understand and use information. And it won't help him become confident in his own abilities.

It can be hard for parents to let children work through problems alone and learn from their mistakes. It's also hard to know where to draw the line between supporting and doing.

Different teachers have different ideas about the best way for parents to provide guidance.

FIGURE OUT HOW YOUR CHILD LEARNS BEST.

If you understand something about the style of learning that suits your child, it will be easier for you to help her.

If you've never thought about this style, observe your child. See if he works better alone or with someone else. If your child gets more done when working with someone else, he may want to complete some homework with a brother or sister or a classmate. (Some homework, however, is meant to be done alone. Check with the teacher if you aren't sure.)

Other things to consider about learning style:

Does your child learn things best when she can see them? If so, drawing a picture or a chart may help with some homework. For example, after reading her science book, she may not remember the difference between the tibia and the fibula. But by drawing a picture of the leg and labelling the bones, she can remember easily.

Does your child learn things best when he can hear them? He may need to listen to a story or have directions read to him. Too much written material or too many pictures or charts may confuse him.

Does your child understand some things best when she can handle or move them? An apple cut four or six or eight ways can help children learn fractions.

HELP YOUR CHILD GET ORGANISED

As mentioned earlier, it's a good idea to set a regular time for children to do homework. Put up a calendar in a place where you'll see it often and record homework on it. If your child's not able to write yet, then do it for him until he can do it himself. Writing out homework tasks will get him used to the idea of keeping track of what's due and when. You may want to write deadline dates for each piece in their homework book instead of on a calendar.

A bag for books will make it easier to carry homework to and from school.

ENCOURAGE GOOD STUDY HABITS.

Teachers generally give children tips on how to study. But it takes time and practice to develop good habits. You can reinforce these habits at home.

Help your child structure time in order to complete homework. For example, if your Secondary child has a biology assignment due in 3 weeks, discuss all the steps she needs to take to complete it on time, including:

- selecting a topic;
- doing the research by looking up books and other materials on the topic and taking notes;
- figuring out what questions to discuss;
- drafting an outline;
- writing a rough draft; and
- revising and completing the final draft.

Encourage your child to write down how much time she expects to spend on each step.

HOW TO HELP: TALK WITH SOMEONE AT SCHOOL TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS

Help your child get started when he has to do research reports or other big pieces of homework. Encourage him to use the library. If he isn't sure where to begin, get him to ask the librarian for suggestions. If he's using a computer for on-line reference resources--whether the computer's at home, school, or the library--make sure he's getting whatever help he needs to use it properly. After your child has done the research, listen while he tells you the points he wants to make in the report.

Give practice tests. Help your child prepare for a spelling test by saying the words while she writes them down. Then have her correct her own test. Encourage her to write imaginative sentences using the spelling words to ensure she understands the context the word is used in.

Help your child avoid last-minute cramming. Review with your Primary child how to study for his maths test well before it's to be given. You can get him to work out a schedule of what he needs to do to, make up a practice test, and write down answers to the questions he's made up.

Talk with your child about how to take a test. Be sure she understands how important it is to read the instructions carefully and to keep track of the time and avoid spending too much time on any one question.

TALK ABOUT THE HOMEWORK.

Ask your child questions. Talking can help him think through a homework task and break it down into small, workable parts. Here are some sample questions:

Do you understand what you're supposed to do? After your child has read the instructions, ask her to tell you in her own words what the homework is about. (If your child can't read yet, the teacher may have sent home instructions that you can read to her.) If your child doesn't understand the instructions, read them with her and talk about the homework. Are there words she doesn't understand? How can she find out what they mean?

What do you need to do to finish the homework? Your child may want to talk through the steps with you (or make a written list of them, if he's able to), as described in the section above on good study habits.

Do you need help in understanding how to do your work? See if your child needs to learn more, for example, about subtracting fractions before she can do her homework. Or find out if the teacher needs to explain to her again when to use capital and lowercase letters.

GIVE PRAISE.

People of all ages respond to praise. And children need encouragement from the people whose opinions they value most--their parents. "Great book report!" or "You've done a brilliant job" can go a long way toward motivating your child to complete homework tasks.

Children also need to know when they haven't done their best work. Make criticism constructive. Instead of telling your child, "You aren't going to hand in that mess, are you?" try, "The teacher will understand your ideas better if you use your best handwriting." Then give praise when a neat version is completed.

Homework hassles can often be avoided when parents value, monitor, and guide their children's homework. But, sometimes helping in these ways is not enough. Problems can still come up. If they do, the schools, teachers, parents, and students may need to work together to resolve them.



SHARE CONCERNS WITH THE TEACHER.

You may want to contact the teacher if

- your child refuses to do her homework, even though you've tried hard to get her to do them;
- instructions are unclear;
- you can't seem to help your child get organised to finish the assignments;
- you can't provide needed supplies or materials;
- neither you nor your child can understand the purpose of homework;
- the tasks are often too hard or too easy;
- the homework is assigned in uneven amounts--for instance, no homework is given on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, but on Thursday your child's teacher asks for a big homework task that is due the next day; or
- your child has missed school and needs to catch up with homework.

In these cases, the teacher will always try to be helpful in resolving such problems.

WORK WITH THE SCHOOL.

Communication between teachers and parents is very important in solving homework problems. Here are some important things to remember:

Talk with teachers early in the school year. Try to make an effort to talk to them every day at sign out time or first thing in the morning. By creating an informal environment to chat to the teachers frequently you can air concerns freely. The teachers will be able to share concerns with you, as well as celebrate successes from the day. Get acquainted before problems arise, and let teachers know that you want to be kept informed. Most teachers have an open door policy where you are always able to share arising concerns with them.

Contact the teacher as soon as you suspect your child has a homework problem. As a School we have a responsibility to keep parents informed, and you have a right to be upset if you don't find out until you receive your child's report that your child is having difficulties. On the other hand, sometimes parents figure out that a problem exists before the teacher does. By alerting the teacher, you can work together to solve a problem in its early stages.

Request a meeting with the teacher to discuss homework problems. Parents for whom English is a second language may need to make special arrangements, such as including another person who is bilingual.

Don't go straight to the Head of Year or Head of Primary without giving the teacher a chance to work out the problem with you and your child.

Approach the teacher with a cooperative spirit. Believe that the teacher wants to help you and your child, even if you disagree about something. It's hard to solve problems if teachers and parents view each other as the opposition.

Let the teacher know if your child is bored with homework or finds it too hard or too easy. (Teachers also like to know when children are particularly excited about an assignment.) Of course, not all homework can be expected to interest your child and be perfectly suited to her. Teachers just don't have time to tailor homework to the individual needs of every student for every night of the week. However, most teachers want to assign homework that children enjoy and can complete successfully, and they welcome feedback from parents.

Many times homework can be structured so that a wide range of children will find assignments interesting. For example:

- Different approaches to the same topic or lesson can be offered to students;
- Extra homework can be given to students who want more challenge; and
- Specialised homework can be given to students having trouble in a particular area.

While meeting with the teacher, explain what you think is going on. Also tell the teacher if you don't know what the problem is. Sometimes a child's version of what's going on isn't the same as the teacher's version. For example, your child may tell you that the teacher never explains the homework so he

can understand them. But the teacher may tell you that your child isn't paying attention when the homework is explained.

Make sure communication is clear. Listen to the teacher and don't leave until you're sure you understand what's being said. Make sure, too, that the teacher understands what you have to say. If, after the meeting, you realise you don't understand something, call or mail the teacher to double check.

Homework can bring together children, parents, and teachers in a common effort to improve student learning. The younger your child is when you start to do the kinds of activities suggested in this guide, the better.

Helping your child with homework is an opportunity to improve your child's chances of doing well in school and life. By helping your child with homework, you can help him learn important lessons about discipline and responsibility. You can open up lines of communication--between you and your child, and you and the school. You are in a unique position to help your child make connections between school work and the "real world," and thereby bring meaning (and some fun) to your child's homework experience.

Whether you succeed in doing all of the activities suggested in this guide is not what's most important. What's most important is that you are willing to take the time and make the effort to be involved in your child's education.



NORD ANGLIA INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL HONG KONG
A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

Contact Us

11 On Tin Street,
Lam Tin, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Email
info@nais.hk

General Enquiries
+852 3958 1488