

Parents' Top Tips for Surviving Homework ... Without Tears

Struggling with your child over math, science, and reading homework every night ranks high on most parents' Least-Favorite list. And yet the work must be done in order for the child to succeed in school. How is a parent to cope?

Most parents have discovered common-sense tactics, such as:

- Have a consistent time and place for your child to study.
- Be available without taking over.
- Stay calm.
- Let your child make choices and set goals by herself.
- Keep the communication channels open, including parent-child and parent-school.

You can read many good articles about homework on our website under the topic "Homework." But we also wanted to find out about surviving homework from a group of seasoned experts: you, the parents who visit our website! So we posed the question to members of our MVP (Most Valuable Parent) Research Club, parents who have signed up to participate in projects aimed at helping us better understand their needs and refine our offerings. They shared unusual, fun, and out-of-the-box thinking about homework. Here are their top eight tips:

1. **Get a study buddy.**

K. Eggenberger says, "My daughter seems to work much better with a 'study buddy.' She is a visual learner, so taking a cue from a peer seems to be successful for her. Kasey homeschools but attends a school funded by our school district to help support her homeschooling. She has some breaks in between her classes where she has an opportunity to work with fellow students. She also has three friends that we get together with a few times a week. It has worked out beautifully."

2. **Make it an adventure.**

LM Stearns suggests, "Do homework in an unusual location — on the jungle gym, or the trampoline, in a closet with a flashlight. Then it becomes an adventure!"

3. **Play school.**

Kristie Hanrahan advises, "I have our 5-year-old son play the role of the teacher. First he tells us about his day. Then we go over the homework together. I act as though I don't understand, and he 'teaches me' and shows me by doing the homework. We get it done, and he feels so proud of his work." This is a clever way to coax a person of any age (including an adult) to synthesize and demonstrate her learning.

4. **Make it fun.**

"Making it fun," says Valerie Lee, "lets them have that feeling of ownership. For example, most kids have difficult time learning beginning math. I put out fish crackers as an aid. The kids get to eat the fish crackers when learning subtraction, which you can reinforce by putting fish crackers into their lunch pails. (You can also use gummy bears, grapes, strips of cheese, or anything that your child likes.)" Find alternatives when homework is difficult for them. Some kids are more visual learners, so use crayons or colored pencils to diagram what they're reading. Think of clever ways to learn — but don't force it."

5. **Innovate.**

Susan Penny's top tip is innovation. She says, "You can help your child by using innovative ways of learning and teaching — the more creative and kooky, the better. When memorizing spelling words, for example, I put a sheet of sandpaper under the notebook paper and have my child write the words using a crayon. The bumpy texture appeals to the sense of touch and affects memory differently." Susan suggests other ways to use the sense of touch and movement. "Finger-paint the spelling words. Or

place a thin layer of sand on a cookie sheet or tray with sides, and write the words in the sand. The child can also use his index finger to write in the air or on a wall. This uses whole-arm motions. "For math, we use tons of homemade index/ flash cards, too. All of these ways I consider innovative — and I never give up."

6. Chart your child's learning.

Sometimes it's hard for the child (as well as the parent) to grasp his or her progress, when peers in school may be sailing along faster. You can help everybody by charting your child's learning — make it visual. That's what Michelle AuCoin does for her son. "I make a progress chart to show where he is now, where he needs to be, and how long it will take him to get there. Then I always plan an incentive at the end for completing the task."

7. Take advantage of technology.

Patsy Campbell advises making the computer your ally. "If your child is forgetful and 'homework-challenged,' putting her behind, I strongly suggest a meeting with the teacher to discuss using email. Most kids and teachers today have an email address. Have your child be his own advocate, emailing the teacher for homework or for missing assignments. "Decide a workable solution with the teacher as to what would be allowable for late homework. Also ask the teacher to assist in showing your child how to keep up and organize homework, which is really the bigger problem for most kids today. "The computer can be of great assistance in this area. Most computers have a calendar, so kids can learn to schedule homework that is due on that calendar. Getting into the habit of checking their calendar may become as great as checking their emails!"

8. Hire a tutor.

Especially for older children who may be experiencing normal parent-child emotional pulls, you may want to act like a corporation and out-source some work: the homework part. Ramona Amoguis counsels, "I'm a teacher myself and have learned how hard it is to help your own child with homework. I can tutor other people's children with great success, but with my own, it's always a disaster. I've heard this from other people, also. "The only thing that has worked for me is to hire an after-school tutor to help my son improve his reading and homework. Because he has dyslexia, we've also eliminated any language-arts homework the teacher sends home, replacing it with Orton-Gillingham tutoring. At the end of each session, his tutor helps him with his math homework from his teacher. This has allowed me to be 'Mom' again, instead of the ugly troll. We now have more fun than melt-downs after school. He does wonders with his tutor that he would never do with me. "I also think that children shouldn't get homework until they can read and understand directions by themselves (about third to fourth grade), and the homework should be no more than 20 to 30 minutes — but that's a whole other can of worms!"

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