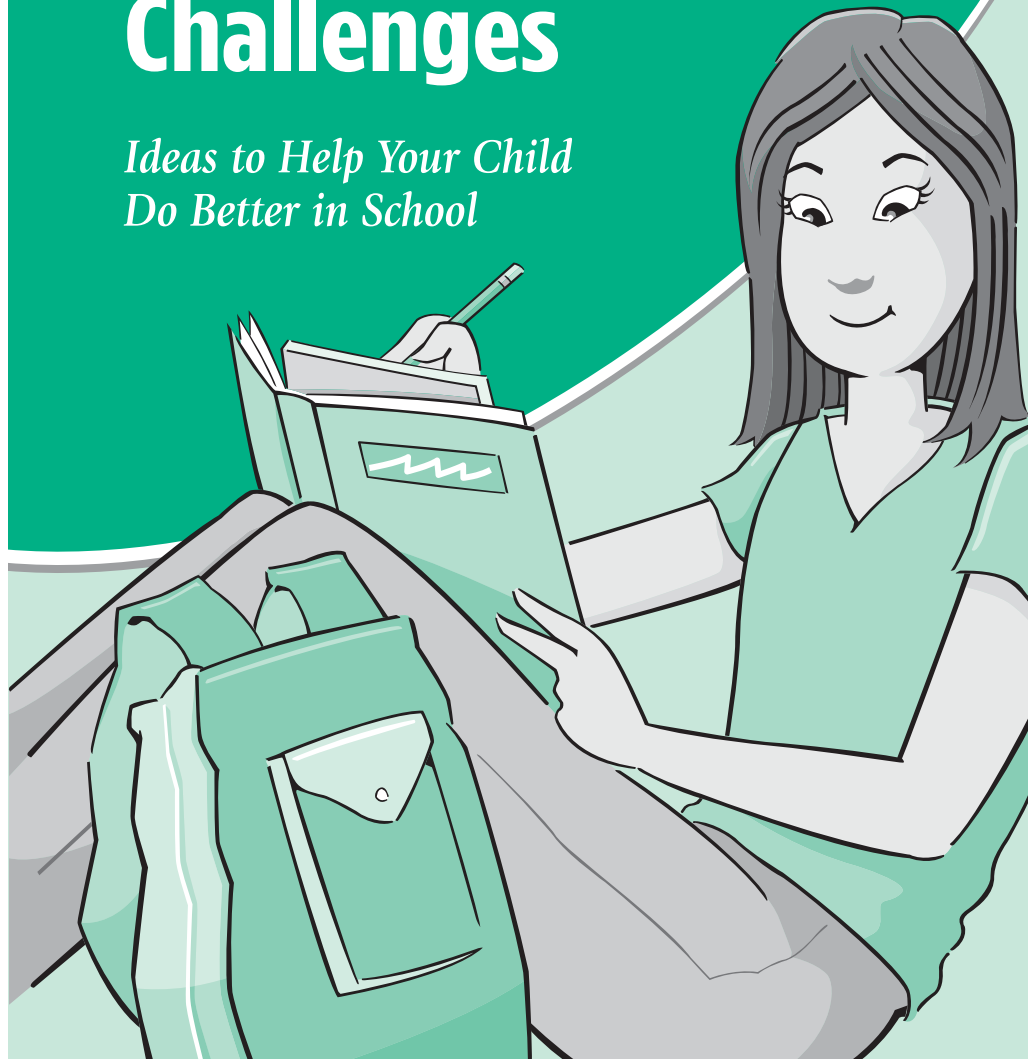


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Conquering Homework Challenges

*Ideas to Help Your Child
Do Better in School*



Homework & Study Skills Series

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®



Homework reinforces what your child is learning in school. It also gives you a chance to become involved in the learning process. But homework can sometimes present challenges for students—and frustration for parents.

No parent likes to nag about homework, so before it leads to daily aggravation or conflict, identify what it is about homework that causes a particular challenge for your child.

Some kids repeatedly forget their assignments. Others have a hard time getting started. Some have trouble with time management or understanding assignments. Still others have a learning disability that makes it difficult to focus. In this booklet, you'll find ways to help your child conquer these and other homework challenges.

Homework will be part of your child's life for the rest of his* years in school. Make it a daily habit to discuss his assignments. Be positive and keep praising your child's effort and hard work and you're sure to see results.

* Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate the use of "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.

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Is This Your Child?

This is too hard." "You know I'm not good in math." "I'm just not smart." If your frustrated child sounds like this at homework time, don't despair! Studies show that there are simple things you can do to help your child overcome these attitudes.

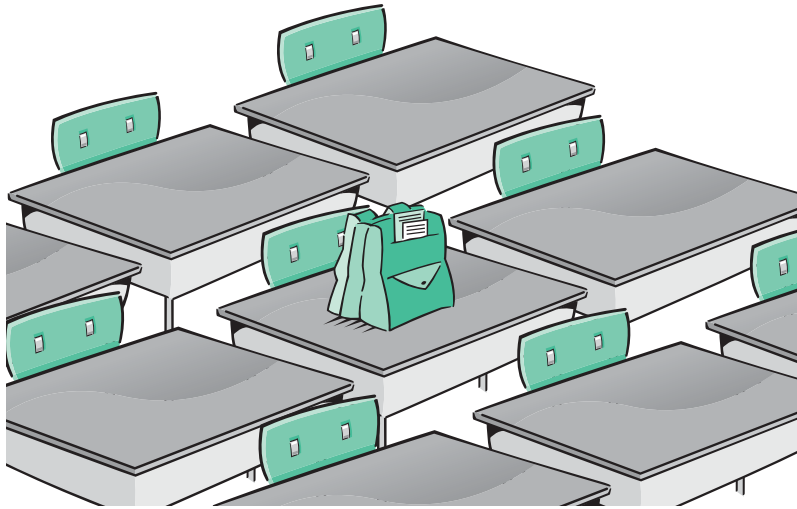
Researchers have discovered how two different views of intelligence can affect achievement and the motivation to learn:

1. **Students who believe that intelligence is fixed**—you're either smart or you're not—are less likely to attempt challenging tasks. They think, "Why bother trying?"
2. **Students who believe that intelligence can be increased** are more likely to put in extra effort and work harder to conquer challenges. Studies also reveal an increase in their test scores.



As a parent, you play an important role in helping your child hold the second view of *being able to increase her intelligence*. For example, if your child quickly gives up because she can't solve a homework math problem:

- **Avoid saying**, "It either comes naturally or it doesn't. I was never good in math either." Instead, say, "Let's take another look at it."
- **Encourage her to read the problem again.** Have her spend a few minutes thinking about it, then restate it in her own words. Have her look at a similar sample problem in the textbook.
- **If she still can't solve the problem**, praise her effort and encourage her to talk with the teacher. Perhaps she can offer a new approach to solving the problem.



I Forgot My Homework

Whether it's getting the homework assignment home *from* school or returning the completed assignment back *to* school, you need to determine why your child is "forgetting" his assignments.

Home from school

If your child truly is forgetful, these tips can help. Encourage him to:

- **Attach sticky notes** to textbooks and notebooks that need to come home at the end of the day.
- **Place worksheets** to be completed for homework immediately in a special homework folder.
- **Write assignments** in a daily planner and ask teachers to initial them.
- **Exchange contact information** with a homework buddy.
- **Check to see** if homework is posted online.

However, if your child is leaving homework at school because he finds it too difficult, talk with his teachers. Ask:

- **Is my child able to grasp** the concepts being taught?
- **Does my child have trouble** paying attention in class?
- **Could my child benefit** from extra help?

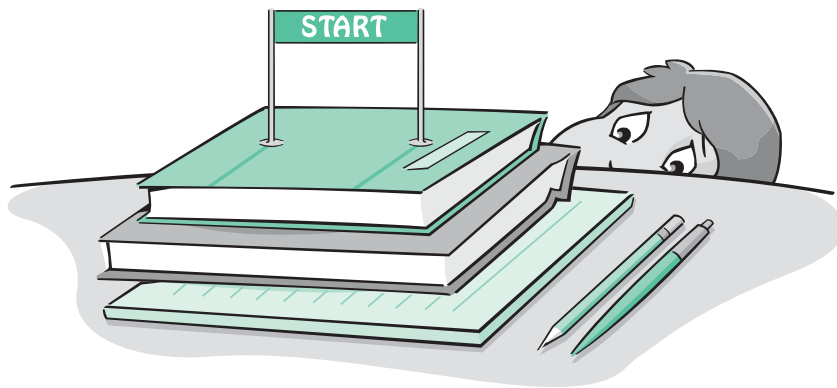
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Back to school

If your child simply doesn't turn in his homework, here's how you can help make sure completed assignments get to school every day. Have him:

1. **Create a daily list** of homework assignments and check off each item as he completes it.
2. **Put completed assignments** in a homework folder and place the folder in his backpack.
3. **Place the backpack** by the door at night before he goes to bed—ready to go to school the next morning.





Getting Off to a Good Start

Sometimes the greatest challenge of doing homework is getting started! You and your child should agree upon a set time for homework every day. But if your child still drags her feet and uses every stall tactic she can think of, consider some of these reasons for her procrastination:

- **Fear of failure.** Some kids are so afraid of failing that they don't try at all. Make sure you're not putting too much pressure on your child. Treat her mistakes as learning experiences, not disappointments.
- **Frustration.** If your child doesn't understand an assignment, she won't be able to complete it. See if you can explain it, or make sure she asks for help at school when needed.
- **Dependency.** When children procrastinate, sometimes parents do the homework for them. This actually encourages procrastination. Let your child face the consequences of her actions, even if it means she gets a bad grade on her assignment.
- **Disorganization.** At the beginning of a large project, many kids don't know how to start. Help your child make a plan for completing her assignment.
- **Stress.** Severe procrastination can be a sign that your child is overwhelmed with her workload or other issues at school. Make an appointment to talk with her teacher or counselor.

Sometimes a child simply needs a jump start. Here are some ideas you can try on occasion:

Use a 'time box'

Tell your child to:

- **"Put some time in a box."** Set aside a specific amount of time to work on a homework assignment. This should be short enough that your child won't put it off. For example, if she can't face spending 20 minutes on math homework—how about 10 minutes?
- **Set a timer for 10 minutes** and work nonstop until it rings. At that point, your child will have two choices. She can keep working until the homework is finished—or she can stop.



You might be surprised! Kids often make the first choice. They think, "Hey, I'm on a roll. Another 10 minutes and I can have all these problems knocked out."

Spin for rewards

Tell your child to:

- **Find a family game** with a spinner.
- **Place a plain white label** describing a small reward on each section the spinner would point to. Here are some ideas for rewards:
 - Choose your favorite dinner menu.
 - Get 10 hugs and kisses.
 - Watch one extra TV show this week.
 - Invite a friend to spend the night.
 - Skip taking out the trash.

You can also write rewards on slips of paper and simply spin an empty bottle on the floor or table. Then each time your child does homework without any nagging from you, she can spin the wheel for a reward. You may also want to assign points to different rewards. Increase the number of points needed to win a reward as your child gets into the "homework habit."

It's a Matter of Time

As your child moves up through grade levels in school, he can expect to have more of everything—more social life, more school activities, more to do in the community—and *more* homework! Getting homework completed each day can be a major challenge, unless your child has a plan in place to manage his time.

Many experts agree on the following suggestions for how much time children should expect to spend on homework:

- *Grades 1–3* 10 to 30 minutes per day
- *Grades 4–6* 30 to 60 minutes per day
- *Grades 7–9* 50 minutes to 2 hours per day
- *Grades 10–12* 1-1/2 to 3 hours per day



Learning to use that homework time wisely is essential. If you repeatedly hear, “I don’t have time to do my homework!” here’s how you can help.

Teach your child to:

- **Start with the big picture.** Get a large calendar and have him fill in all his assignments according to their due dates. If he has a research paper due in three weeks, 21 days should be plenty of time, right? Now have him write down all his other commitments: a track meet, a choir concert, a weekend family trip, an important math test to study for, not to mention that great new movie he wants to see. How many days does he *really* have to complete the research assignment?
- **Plan carefully.** If an assignment is due on Friday, and your child has a school concert on Thursday night, he needs to schedule time for working on that assignment Wednesday night.
- **Map out daily homework and study time.** Your child should transfer his assignments to a daily planner. Tell him to schedule several short breaks. They’re that important.

Some experts recommend working on difficult assignments first, while the brain is freshest. Others suggest starting with the easiest work first to boost motivation with a sense of accomplishment. Observe your child to see what works best for him. Then have him check off each assignment as he completes it.

If your child dawdles at homework time, here are some ways you can help her manage her time:

- **Remove distractions**—that means no TV, phone or loud music. Your child might even want to place a “Do Not Disturb” sign at her study spot. And if your child needs to use a computer at homework time, be vigilant. This is not the time for social networking.
- **Play “Beat the Clock.”** If your child takes an hour to complete an assignment the teacher says should take 15 minutes, set a timer. Challenge her to finish before the timer goes off.

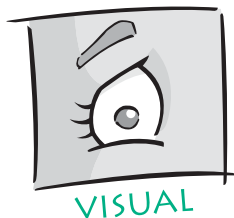
If your child consistently takes too long to complete homework assignments, remember to ask:

- **Does she understand the assignment?**
- **Does she understand the concepts being taught?**
- **Does she put an unreasonable amount of pressure on herself to be perfect?**

If the problem continues, make an appointment with her teacher. What does she observe in the classroom? Ask what you can do at home to help your child complete homework in a reasonable amount of time.

Remember to keep telling your child that you have confidence in her. Praise her efforts at learning to manage her time. Did she finish that research paper on time? Go out for ice cream or pop some popcorn for a special movie night.

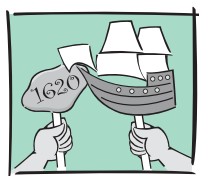




VISUAL



AUDITORY



TACTILE

What's Your Child's Learning Style?

Each person usually has a particular way of tackling a project. The same is true for kids and homework. Julia can study while she's listening to the radio. But Sam stops working if someone turns the page of a newspaper. Gabriel needs to write spelling words over and over. But Tamika does better by spelling them aloud.

These differences have nothing to do with intelligence. But they do show that kids learn in different ways. Discover how your child learns best, and homework and study time will be more productive.

Here are some questions to consider:

- **Does your child prefer to see things written down?** That's a sign that he's a visual learner. Encourage him to use charts, pictures or graphs. He can post vocabulary words on the refrigerator or physics formulas on his mirror.
- **Does your child follow oral directions well?** Can he listen to stories for hours? He's probably an auditory learner. You can help by repeating math facts or spelling words aloud. Or have him record important information and play it back.
- **Does your child like to take things apart to see how they work?** He's probably a kinesthetic or tactile learner. He needs hands-on learning. Let him create models he can manipulate to help him understand concepts. He can put on a play to show you what he's learning in history. Have him make up songs, poems or raps to recite as he moves about the room learning formulas.

There's no "best" way to learn. But by understanding your child's approach to learning, you can help him make better use of his homework time.

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Be a Partner With Your school

When students move to the upper grades, most parents feel that they are no longer able to help with homework. And it *can* be a challenge, especially in advanced science and math classes. But this is no time to back away!



You may not be able to help with the specific details of every subject, but you can still play an important role in guiding and supporting your child's homework efforts. The best approach is to work with your child's teachers.

Ask questions about the homework policy, such as:

- **How often** do you assign homework?
- **Do you accept** late homework?
- **What are consequences** for not turning in homework?
- **How does homework figure** into students' grades?

If your child struggles with homework in a particular subject, or you see that the homework load is more than she can handle, ask the teacher for advice.

Ask questions such as:

- **How much time** should I expect my child to spend on homework in your class?
- **What does my child need to know** to be successful with this lesson?
- **Can you suggest** ways I can help at home?
- **Can you recommend** additional resources?
- **Do you post assignments** on your website?
- **Do you have an after-school program** to help with homework?

Continue to be a helping resource for your child at homework time. Be available to make sure she understands the assignments and is well organized with all the necessary supplies. Ask to look over her assignments when she's finished.

Meeting Special Challenges

All students struggle with homework from time to time. But it can be a major challenge for students with special learning differences. Here are some things to consider as you help your child meet the challenges and frustrations of homework.

Students who are distractible or have ADHD

Help your child understand that everyone has different jobs to do every day. Doing homework every day is one of his jobs—and a normal part of his daily responsibilities. To help him concentrate and focus, remember that your child needs:

- **Sleep.** Sometimes, because of medication to control symptoms or after an overly stimulating day, children with ADHD find it difficult to “turn off” to go to sleep. But if your child does not get enough sleep, his ability to concentrate will suffer. Maintaining a strict schedule and keeping excitement to a minimum prior to bedtime may help your child get the sleep he needs in order to learn.
- **Routines.** Your child needs a regular time and place to do homework—and he needs to stick to it every day. Make sure his homework place is well stocked with necessary supplies, but is otherwise clear of clutter.
- **Activity.** Help your child review math facts as you clap hands or toss a rolled-up sock back and forth. Make up songs to study vocabulary words. Build in frequent breaks of physical activity during your child’s homework time.
- **Quiet.** Make sure homework time is free of distractions. Playing soft music in the background can often have a calming effect.
- **Guidance.** It’s a good idea to go over homework together every day to make sure your child understands the assignments.



Students with more challenges or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Exhaustion from the social and mental stress of a school day can lead to special challenges for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Your supervision and your help with organization, time management and planning are essential. You can help your child:

- **Prioritize.** Begin each homework session by reviewing your child’s assignments together, then helping him determine what to do first, next, etc.
- **Break up his assignments.** You might use a kitchen timer to help your child focus on small bits of homework at a time. When the timer goes off, celebrate with a break to keep him motivated.
- **Work with teachers.** See if they can help by flagging assignments and materials to take home. Ask if your child might use an audio recorder in class to help him recall important information or assignments.

If your child continues to struggle, don’t be tempted to do the homework for him. Ask for help. Start by talking with the teacher. The guidance counselor may also be able to recommend tutors who work particularly well with students with learning disabilities.

Celebrate Success!

Whatever challenges homework may present, to help your child stay motivated, it's important to recognize accomplishments along the way. Did your child give a particularly difficult assignment her best effort? Did she remember to bring her assignments home every day this week? Did she turn in a large project on time?

Make a progress chart for a particular homework challenge. Together, decide on a reward for conquering that challenge. Have your child keep track of her achievements to remind her that she's getting closer to her goal.

To celebrate success:

- **Share pride.** Hang up your child's finished work for all to see. Ask if you can send a copy of a report that she completed with hard work and extra effort to a relative.
- **Create a success album.** Fill a scrapbook with your child's accomplishments, such as improved homework grades or a list of books she's read. Take it out when she needs a self-esteem boost.
- **Use specific praise.** Say, "You deserve that good grade. You planned your science project carefully and never gave up."
- **Do something special.** Plan a fun family activity in honor of your child's hard work. Rent a movie, cook a special meal or say, "Let's go out for ice cream."



Expect success. Say things like, "I have confidence in you." Children are much more likely to do well if parents believe in them.

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Removing homework hurdles does not mean doing homework for your child. Homework is part of learning—and it is your child's job.

Conquering Homework Challenges is one of six booklets in the Homework & Study Skills series, published by The Parent Institute®, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. Call (800) 756-5525.

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