

Tips For Helping Kids and Teens With Homework and Study Habits

Certain key practices will make life easier for everyone in the family when it comes to study time and study organization. However, some of them may require an adjustment for other members of the family.

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Turn off the TV set. Make a house rule, depending on the location of the set, that when it is study time, it is "no TV" time. A television set that is on will draw youngsters like bees to honey.

What about the radio? Should it be on or off? Contrary to what many specialists say, some youngsters do seem to function all right with the radio turned on to a favorite music station. (Depending on the layout of your house or apartment, maybe an investment in earphones would be worthy of consideration.)

Certain rules should be set about the family phone during study hours. The more people in the household, the more restrictions on long and unnecessary phone calls are needed. A timer, placed next to the phone, can help to control the length of calls so that the telephone will be available if it becomes necessary to call a schoolmate to confirm an assignment or discuss particularly difficult homework.

Designate specific areas for homework and studying. Possibilities include the child's room or the kitchen or dining room table. Eliminate as much distraction as possible.

Since many young people will study in their own rooms, function becomes more important than beauty. Most desks for young people really don't have sufficient space to spread out materials. A table that allows for all necessary supplies such as pencils, pens, paper, books, and other essentials works extremely well.

Consider placing a bulletin board in your child's room. Your local hardware store sells wallboard that might not look too pretty and isn't framed, but a 4 x 3' section is inexpensive and perfect on which to post pertinent school items. You might want to paint or cover it with burlap to improve its appearance or let your child take on this project.

Encourage the use of a small book or pad for writing down assignments so that there is no confusion about when certain assignments must be turned in to the teacher.

Keeping general supplies on hand is important. Check with your child about his needs. In fact, make it his responsibility to be well supplied with paper, pencils, note pads, notebook paper, et cetera.

Regularity is a key factor in academic success. Try to organize the household so that supper is served at a standard time, and once it and family discussions are over, it's time to crack the books. If the student doesn't have other commitments and gets home reasonably early from school, some homework can be done before supper.

During a homework session, watch for signs of frustration. No learning can take place and little can be accomplished if the child is angry or upset over an assignment that is too long or too difficult. At such times the parent may have to step in and simply halt the homework for that night, offering to write a note to the teacher explaining the situation and perhaps requesting a conference to discuss the quality and length of homework assignments.

Should parents help with homework? Yes-if it is clearly productive to do so, such as calling out spelling words or checking a math problem that won't prove. No-if it is something the child can clearly handle himself and learn from the process. And help and support should always be calmly and cheerfully given. Grudging help is worse than no help at all!

Read directions, or check over math problems after your child has completed the work. Remember to make positive comments - you don't want your child to associate homework with fights at home.

Model research skills by involving your child in planning a family trip. Help your child locate your destination on a map or atlas. Use traditional encyclopedia or a CD-ROM to find information about the place you will visit; try the Internet or books in the library.

How best to handle report cards? To save shocks and upsets, gently discuss from time to time "how things are going at school- with your child. Something casual, such as "How did the math test go?" "How did you do on the history report?" "How's your science project coming along? Need any help?" are questions that aren't "third degree" but indicate interest. Find out if it is a policy at your child's school to send out "warning notices" when work isn't going well. Generally, such notices require the parent's signature to verify that the parent has, indeed, been alerted. This is the time to contact the teacher of the course, along with your child, to learn what the difficulty may be. If such notices aren't sent, then grades on projects and reports and from tests may be the sole source of information short of what your child wishes to share. Be tuned in to statements such as "He's an awful teacher," "She goes too fast," etc. This may be the child's way of indicating frustration in understanding content or lack of study time with the subject. However, be cautious in contacting teachers without your child's approval or interest. It may disrupt good feelings between you and make you seem to be interfering and spying