



Grandparents as Parents: Helping Children Succeed in School

Helping Children with Homework

Many children think of homework as punishment rather than as a reinforcement for the learning done during the school day. Although designed to help children develop a sense of discipline and organization, homework can trigger a power struggle between adult and child.

Constant nagging and children's avoidance of homework can generate negative attitudes toward schoolwork done at home. The following tips on assisting children with their homework can help adults approach this task more positively.

1. *Children should have a consistent quiet time for doing their homework.* Decide together on a particular time to do homework each day. The length of this quiet time will vary with children's ages and the amount of homework. For example, 6:30–7:30 could be set aside every night for a 12-year-old, with less time for younger children and more time for older children. Homework should be completed during the quiet time. If the child finishes the homework before the allotted time is over, pleasure reading may be done. If the child's favorite television show occurs during this time, the quiet time can be rearranged for that night to accommodate the child. Adults can model appropriate behavior for children by reading during this quiet time instead of watching television.

How does this tip help the child? The child is less likely to rush through homework, and television viewing may be controlled.

2. *Help children complete one or two examples in their homework—not every problem or question.* When a child turns in homework that is done accurately, the teacher assumes

the child understands the material. If the child doesn't really understand the material because the homework was finished by someone else, the child may become frustrated and perform poorly on subsequent assignments.

How does this tip help the child?

The child gets some attention from the adult but also develops independence in completing projects on her or his own. Teachers see the mistakes the child makes on homework and can appropriately chart the child's progress in understanding concepts.

3. *Help children organize a time frame for difficult homework and long-term projects.* Science projects and term papers cannot be done overnight. Help children set up specific goals for long-term assignments, such as setting up a specific date to have information gathered. Difficult homework may require more structured study breaks and may need to be done early in the evening when the child is more rested. Help children break projects into smaller steps that do not seem so overwhelming to them.



For inspiration . . .

Kind words are jewels that live in the heart and soul and remain as blessed memories years after they have been spoken.

Marvea Johnson

How does this tip help the child? The child learns how to pace work in relation to his or her ability and goals, and the child learns how to organize time and complete work in stages.

4. *Reduce stress in the child's life.* Some children have so many extracurricular activities that they are too tired or distracted to do homework. Soccer, piano, 4-H, and swimming practice are too much for a child to do when there is also homework to complete. One or two extracurricular activities are usually enough for most children.

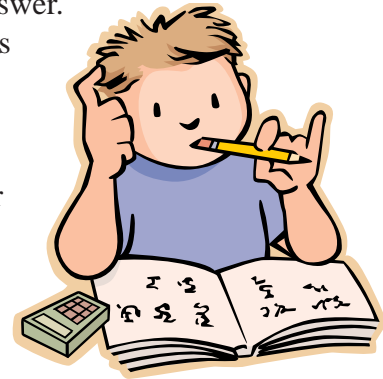
How does this tip help the child? The child learns how to avoid burnout and overload. The child has enough energy to complete homework accurately and has some free time to relax.

5. *Recognize the limits of your patience.* If you are constantly irritated with your grandchild because she or he tries several times before spelling a word correctly or has trouble completing a math problem, get help from a tutor. Someone from school or the neighborhood could recommend an acceptable tutor. Neither the family nor the child benefits from tense and negative feelings that arise from impatient adults trying too hard to help children with homework.

How does this tip help the child? The child sees that the adults recognize his or her strengths and weaknesses; the relationship between adult and child is saved, and the child performs better on school assignments.

6. *Use a non-threatening approach.* Children make mistakes in homework assignments. Instead of saying, "That's wrong—here's the right answer," ask the child how he or she got the answer.

When the child is asked to explain the thinking process about the answer, he or she often catches mistakes and is less discouraged.



Another advantage of using this technique is that you can discover the mistaken logic behind the incorrect answer.

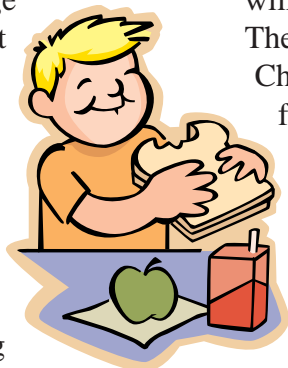
How does this tip help the child? The child becomes more secure in his or her own ability, and the caregivers are thought of as encouraging and supportive instead of threatening.

7. *Support the teacher.* When you see problems with the amount or type of homework that teachers are assigning, make an appointment with the teacher to discuss the issue. Complaining to the teacher in front of the child can encourage the child to question the

Grandchildren Learn Food Habits

A baby is born liking sweets, but most food habits are learned at an early age and may continue for life. What your grandchildren eat today and tomorrow will affect their health now and when they are older.

As a grandparent raising grandchildren, you play a very important part in helping your grandchildren learn good eating habits. Start today.



After age one, your grandchildren's growth will slow down, and they will need less food. They will not eat as much as infants do. Children will not eat the same amount of food from day to day, from year to year, or from child to child.

It is best to let your grandchildren decide how much food they need. Don't worry if your grandchildren don't eat much, as long as they are growing correctly. Children will eat when they are hungry. Don't force your grandchildren to eat.

Help Children Feel Successful

- Offer praise often.
- Answer their questions.
- Teach children task management.
- Break jobs into small steps.
- Give them time to try.
- Help when asked.
- Talk to children—not at them.
- Help them practice.

teacher's competence and authority, creating discipline problems in school.

How does this tip help the child? The child maintains respect for the adults' positions; families and teachers work together to help children learn and grow in a positive direction.

Even Intelligent Children Need Smart Study Habits

The beginning of the school year is a good time to help your grandchild become smarter. Being smart is more than being intelligent. It involves being practical, having common sense, and using better organization and study habits. Your intelligent grandchild could know all the answers to the homework assignment, but it takes "smarts" to remember to bring the assignment home in the first place.

Organization is the first step to getting smarter. It is important to have all the materials to do a job. An easy way to remember school supplies is to keep a checklist that includes basic supplies such as paper, pens, pencils, binder, notebook, ruler, schedule, calculator, dictionary, assignment sheet, completed homework, textbooks, and the name of one student in each class (to call for homework or missed class notes).

Many of the smaller items can be kept in a plastic pouch hooked into the binder. After a while, the written checklist may become unnecessary as the routine of getting organized is established.



Keeping track of assignments is the next step to school success. Small memo pads are too easily lost or misplaced. Making a weekly assignment sheet in a notebook or binder is a more effective way to do the job.

Finally, smarter kids study better. Study habits can make the difference between poor grades and good ones or good ones and great ones. It is never too early to help your grandchild learn good study skills. They carry over to later life and work by teaching children the process of organizing time, working independently, and developing self-discipline.

A first-grader should be shown how to study for a spelling test by using a simplified version of the following tips for older students:

- It is important to study in a place that allows for the most comfortable position, whether it be sitting at a desk or lying on the bed or floor.
- Study on a full stomach.
- Don't study when tired.
- When concentration becomes difficult, it is time for a break. Study breaks are necessary but should not be used as an excuse for not studying.
- Elementary school students should study for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, and students in sixth through ninth grades should do 30 minutes of work before taking a 10-minute break.
- Discuss and relate materials to the student's own experience.
- Go over the material several hours after looking at it.
- Very young children (first to third grade) often need an adult to test or question them for the entire study period. Third to sixth graders can be questioned when they have completed studying.

Help Children Do Their Homework Properly

- Locate homework supplies in a specific place.
- Establish a homework routine.
- Homework should be done on time.

- Do memorization work last so they have a better chance of remembering it.
- Vary the work. If there are reading assignments in English and science and practice work in math, do one reading assignment, then math, and finish with the other reading.

The most important things a grandparent can do is offer their grandchildren support at all times, help them deal with mistakes, and help them develop judgment skills and positive feelings of self-acceptance. Children who are taught to handle stress well develop self-confidence, which carries over into all other aspects of their lives.

Praise

Self-confidence is very important in school. Confident children don't give up when an assignment is difficult. They are not afraid to raise their hands, ask questions, or try again when they've made a mistake. They believe they'll succeed, and they do.

High Esteem

More than nine out of 10 grandparents agree that they can help their grandchildren succeed in school by praising them when they do well (*World Book/NAESP study*).

Praise them often. When you praise your grandchildren for their good efforts, they'll feel like trying, learning, and doing even more.

Tell why. When your grandchildren do well, mention why you are proud of them. "I hear you did a great job on that science fair project." Compliments work best when they are about something specific.

Don't compare. Praise your grandchildren for what they do, not for how they compare to anyone else—brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, or classmates.

Be sincere. Even very young children know when they deserve praise—and when they don't. Congratulate your grandchildren when they have truly done well or worked hard on their school work.

Family Values

More than three out of four grandparents say they can help their grandchildren by discussing why discipline and a strong work ethic are important for everyone (*World Book/NAESP study*).

Remind them of rules. Praise them for playing fair, being a good loser, behaving kindly, or following rules at home and school. Everyone loses, including the child, when there's no respect for rules.

Try rewards. An occasional reward can be a great way to praise, especially if it's not expected. Send a note with a surprise enclosed; take them to get a treat, or invite them on a special outing alone with you. Help them, also, to appreciate the feeling of working hard and doing well—a reward in itself.

Be overheard. Let them hear you saying something good about them to other people. Repeat the compliments you hear about them.

Look beyond sports. Try not to focus your praise only on athletic skills. Concentrate your compliments on ways they're improving their minds.

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