

Homework Strategies for Busy Families

by Sharon Marshall Lockett

Today's families are busier than ever. Helping your children with their homework may seem like another task that takes up too much time. Fortunately, homework is something that can be managed creatively, reducing the amount of time spent on it while increasing its effectiveness and the sense of connection you have with your children.

Make homework a shared activity

Invite your child's friends over so they can do homework together. Don't be afraid to join in these study sessions from time to time. When you do, ask the students to explain their answers—encouraging them to explore their reasoning helps them learn their assignments more thoroughly. It's all right to let them digress periodically, as long as they get their work done. It makes learning more enjoyable.

Two-parent households can optimize their total "together" time by sharing responsibilities for homework, evening chores, and child care. Older brothers and sisters can tutor younger children.

Single-parent households can join forces; while one parent helps the children with homework, another can take care of meals, chores, and child care for younger children. These arrangements can provide all parents with a little more time to spend getting involved in their children's education, and a lot more moral support.

Use alternative sites

Some schools have realized they need to provide homework and tutoring centers. If your school does not provide after-school study halls and tutoring, let them know you need help during the gap between the end of school and the end of your work day. Programs exist to help schools provide trained helpers to students on campus.

Day care providers also should be approached about setting aside time for children to do their homework.

Request that they have staff available to help.

Community centers, libraries, and places of worship are among the community-based groups that have begun to offer tutoring. Often, college students who are interested in the



Personality. Is your child quiet and reflective or outgoing and always in motion? A quiet child will sit at a table to read or complete assignments; a child in motion might need to talk through an assignment with you or discuss homework over a game of catch before writing.

Strengths. At what activities does your child excel? Use his or her strengths to help compensate for weaknesses.

Patterns. Observe and record your child's study patterns. Include times of the day and various reactions to food or stimuli.

helping professions volunteer their time at these locations. Contact your town government to find out whether these programs are offered and how to sign up.

Make the most of homework time

The time your children spend on homework can be reduced drastically by applying the following proven principles of learning:

Use senses to increase learning. Research exists that confirms that using all the senses can enhance learning. Reading aloud, drawing pictures, and using mental imagery can help students learn and retain lessons more quickly and thoroughly.

Break lessons into manageable chunks. Children can grow frustrated by studying too much material at one time. Limit new material to between 15 and 25 items. Review 20 items and add five new ones during a study session.

Study the unknown. Divide material to be learned into two stacks: that which they already know, and that which they need to learn. Have them study only what they don't know for 5–15 minutes. Wait 2–24 hours; mix the material up, and divide it again.

Ask questions. Have your child create a question and/or read the questions at the end of a chapter before he or she begins to read a textbook assignment. Tell your child to say the answer out loud when they come across it to help them understand and retain the information.

Associate. Alphabetizing, sequencing, and categorizing make learning easier. Singing information to the tune of a familiar song can also enhance learning and retention.

Personalize. Substitute your child's name for characters in a story. Relate a math problem to a child's allowance. Transfer something learned to an everyday event.

Know your child

Every child is different, so it's important to begin by learning what works best for each one. Pay special attention to the following items:

Food. A child experiencing either low or high blood sugar levels will have short-term memory impairment. Never insist that homework be completed before dinner. Provide healthy snacks during study sessions.

Energy level. Is your child a morning person or an evening person? Evening people need to stay up late to finish homework; morning people will be more productive if they get a good night's sleep and get up early to do homework.

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These observations may help your school and healthcare professionals find solutions to learning difficulties.

The best strategy for tackling homework is to use study time efficiently and, most important, get help from available resources. **OC**

Sharon Marshall Lockett is director of Educational Innovations/SCORE, a national cocurricular support program based in Laguna Niguel, California, and author of *Home Sweet Homework: A Parent's Guide to Stress-Free Homework & Studying Strategies that Work*.

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