



## THE FAMILY TREE

### Homework Helper

Homework is a child's responsibility, so we need to be careful how much we help. We want to be aware of what our children are doing and be involved in helpful ways, but not help too much. Avoid the word "we" — it implies that homework is our responsibility. Say, "When are *you* going to do *your* homework?" If they are having problems, figure out *why*.

**If children have a time management problem**, teach *them* how to schedule their time, instead of taking over and reminding them. Ask questions like, "How much time do you need for homework? Would you like to do homework right after school or right after dinner? How can you remember when it is time to do your homework?"

**If children don't understand homework**, ask questions that help *them* figure out the answer. "What are you supposed to do here? Where in the book does it talk about this?" If children don't understand the information, we can try explaining it. We do not have to understand what children are learning to be helpful. We just need to know the skills for helping our *children* find their own answers. If children need daily help, they may benefit from a tutor more than our taking responsibility for helping them. It's a delicate balance to be helpful, without fostering dependency, rescuing, or helping too much.

**If children forget a book, lunch, or homework**, teach organizational skills and use problem solving to let children choose self-reminders. Avoid being their reminder or rescuer. Agree to deliver forgotten items no more than three times per year. After that, the child will need to experience the natural consequence of not having the item.

**If children don't see the value of homework**, avoid lecturing. Ask questions like, "Why do you think the teacher wants you to do homework? How can doing homework help you? What will happen if you don't do it?" Offer one *brief* value statement like, "Sometimes people ask us to do things they feel are important but we don't. At work I have to do what my boss asks me to do. School is your job and teachers are your boss. You need to follow the school's rules, even if you don't agree with them. As long as they aren't asking you to do something hurtful or wrong, you need to do what they ask to do your job well."

**When children don't do homework *on purpose***, it could be one of four reasons:

- Children might "act stupid" so teachers (or parents) will pay ***attention*** and spend time helping them. If the parent/teacher involves the child in meaningful activities or spends other special time with the child, it can prevent or stop this behavior.
- Children might want to prove that they have ***power***, by refusing to cooperate. "You can't make me." They also might see if they can get others to take over and do the work for them. After all, if others will take responsibility why not let them?
- Children might not do homework to "punish" a disliked teacher. If good grades are important to parents and children want to hurt them, getting poor grades can be ***revenge***. Help children find more appropriate ways to resolve the problem with the parent/teacher.
- Children may not do their homework because they are so discouraged they have ***given up***. Give encouragement, not pressure, and help them break down assignments into smaller tasks to solve.

**Children who have given up on school** are experiencing a deeper problem. Listen closely to identify the real issue. *This* is what needs to be resolved. Have children brainstorm possible solutions. You may enlist professional guidance, if indicated.

The two key points to remember about halting homework hassles are (a) you need to identify and resolve the "real issue" that's causing the problem and (b) do this in a way that teaches children how to solve their *own* problems.