

I Don't Help My Child with Homework

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I hate homework. No, here's a better statement: I loathe homework. I suppose that's a pretty bold, maybe even a hypocritical statement to make, considering I was a former classroom teacher! Allow me to clarify: I believe there's value in homework, either to practice what was learned in class because our brain's muscle memory benefits from repetition, or to continue the learning process by applying what was learned much like revising an essay for better word choice or for better organization.

Ok, so a more specific statement is: I loathe doing homework. More accurately, I loathe doing my children's homework. The truth is, only the person doing the homework can reap the benefits of doing the exercise, so I have resolved never to help my children with homework. Instead, I equip them to be problem-solvers. I ask a

series of questions that enable them to take responsibility for their own learning. Here's what I ask them:

Questions I Ask to Guide Math Assignments

Do you understand what the question is asking?

Most of the time, clarifying the terms or steps that need to be taken to solve the problem will put them on the right track to getting it right.

Do you need me to demonstrate an example?

Without solving their actual homework problem, I will walk them through the procedure of solving their problem. Once they understand the process, they can apply it to all other problems.

Can I direct you to another resource for help?

When children come to me for help, they see me as an expert on the subject. While this might work for elementary school subjects, this would simply be impossible when their studies get more advanced. They have to acknowledge other sources of authority on topics they are learning.

Questions I Ask to Guide Writing

Assignments

This seems a bit confusing, can you read it out loud to me?

When kids hear their own writing, some of the errors in their writing will become apparent. If they are stumbling over their own reading, they will be able to tell which areas still need more clarification.

Can you explain what you mean in your own words?

Sometimes, they really can't hear where their organizational flow or logical arguments are lacking. Take away the obstacles of writing by treating it like a conversation. When they explain their ideas verbally, take notes so they can see how they want to convey their ideas.

This is a great word here, but is there something better?

Children will use simple and general words because it's easy. However, finding more apt words to describe their ideas and feelings (other than mad, sad, glad, for example) will be the mark of a sophisticated thinker. I aim to point out 2-3 words for them to reconsider so they get in the habit of evaluating words they use.

Here's to lifelong, self-directed, problem solvers!

Jaime

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