

Homework: A Guide to Inspire Learning



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Last week we had our grandkids stay with us for a few days while their parents worked and traveled. Packets of homework and home learning projects were sent along with their clothing. As credentialed teachers, Grandpa and I decided that we could each focus on our strengths while guiding our grandkids to complete their assignments. I focused on language arts while Grandpa focused on math assignments. Our greatest challenge was to inspire independent problem solving while encouraging learning.

Strategies for Success

Here are ten strategies that worked for us:

Consider the timing for learning. Morning instruction works best for the most challenging assignments after the children eat a healthy breakfast.

Give lots of learning breaks when children become blocked or overwhelmed with an assignment.

Build in a motivational award after learning is completed each day. One afternoon we played at the beach. Another day we went swimming with the kids. Each recreational activity reinforced physical fitness and cooperative play.

When tackling a new concept in math, check with your child about what they already know. Also, confirm what they understand about any new math concepts. It helps to review a math packet before working with a child to ensure that you understand the assignment. If you understand what the child must learn when completing math assignments, you can guide them in their problem-solving strategies. For example, when working with upper grade concepts, you can start with basic math strategies (e.g. addition, subtraction, multiplication, division). Then you can integrate more complex concepts into the discussion (e.g. fractions, powers of 10, or algebraic and geometric concepts).

When working with early readers, you can help the child evaluate what she will be reading by looking at the pictures and asking clarification and comprehension questions.

Early readers can reinforce their phonics skills and memorization of sight words when reading with parents. You can ask an older sibling to help with the reading assignment if you are unsure of how to teach phonics. Parents can also join an afterschool reading group with other parents who are learning to master phonics and sounding out words.

Basic and more advanced readers can learn how to expand their reading comprehension by answering comprehension questions about a story (e.g. who,

what, when, where, or how). Children can journal their impressions about what they read, change the ending or beginning of a story, or research a topic discussed in a story.

Reading comprehension skills can be reinforced in social studies and science homework assignments.

Project-based learning assignments can enhance creativity and support new problem-solving strategies.

When to Ask for Help

If your child continues to be overwhelmed with homework assignments, write to the teacher. Work through a resolution with the teacher for added homework support. Homework is only appropriate when a child can thrive and learn from the experience. It should not be a gut-wrenching power struggle between parents and children with anger about the challenges of homework.

Much success in partnering with your children's academic successes!