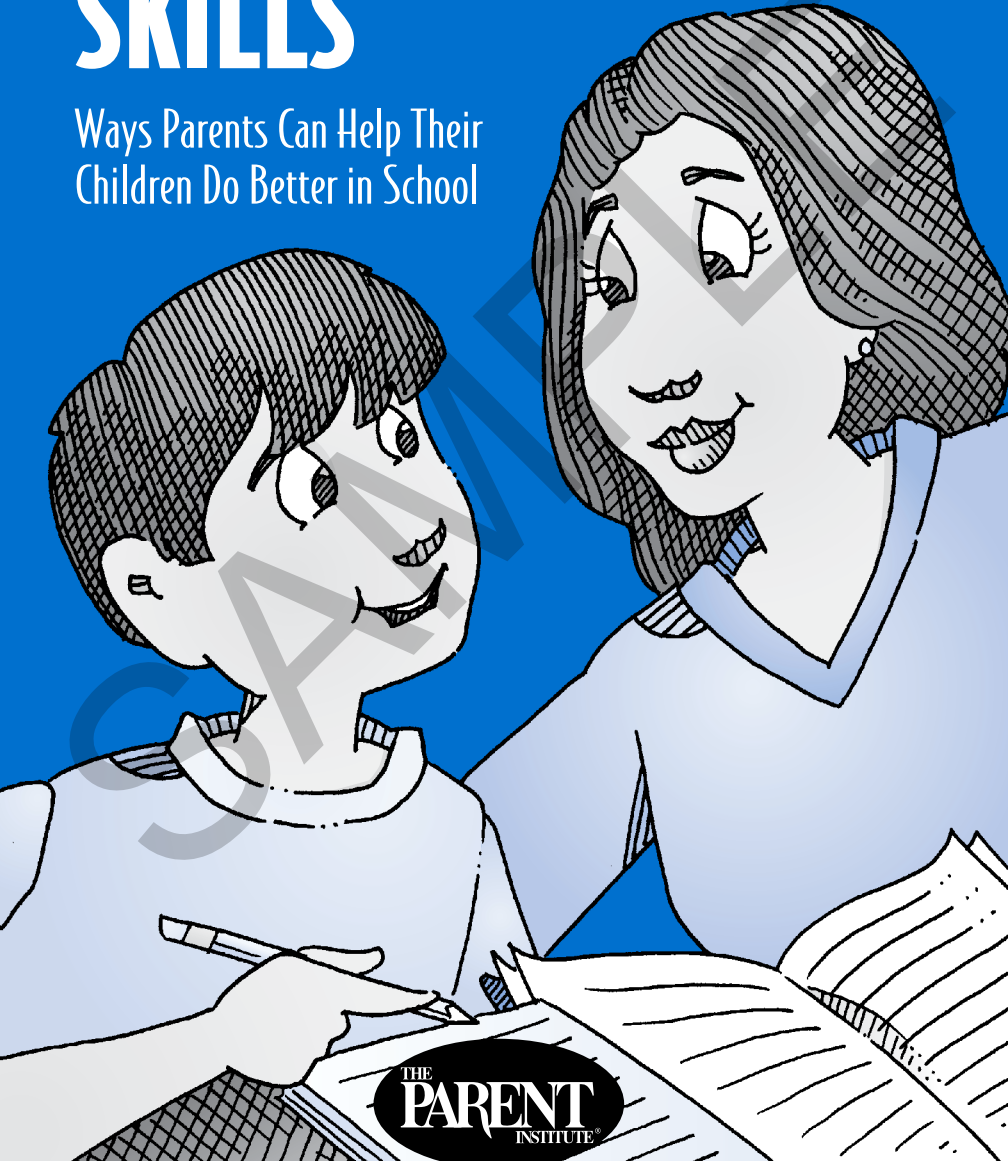


Skills for School Success

BUILDING HOMEWORK SKILLS

Ways Parents Can Help Their
Children Do Better in School



THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE

One of a Series of Booklets for Parents

Why Have Homework?

Helping children build good homework skills is one of the most important ways parents can help children do better in school.

Homework can:

- **Help students learn.** When students review material at home, they remember it longer and understand it better.
- **Teach students that learning takes place everywhere.** Through regular homework assignments, students see that learning takes place in the home and in the community as well as in the classroom.
- **Teach self-discipline.** Let's face it—some days it's tough for a child to sit down and study. But when a student gets into the habit of regular homework, she* learns the rewards of self-discipline.
- **Help students learn to use their time wisely.** Planning is an important skill for completing homework—and for success in life.

This booklet suggests practical ways you can help your child build good homework skills—and help her do better in school.

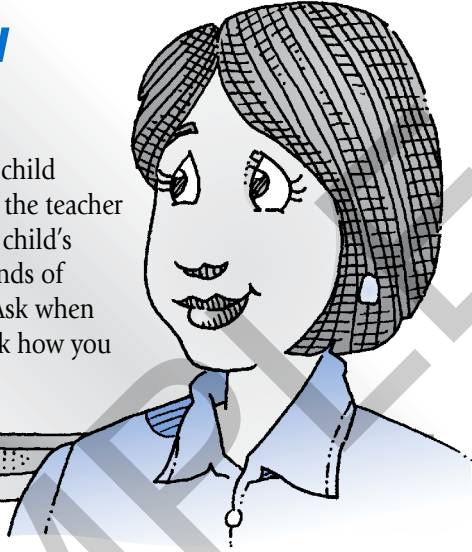


* *Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.*



Get to Know The Teacher

It's easier to help your child when you know what the teacher expects. Meet with your child's teacher and ask what kinds of assignments are given. Ask when assignments are due. Ask how you can help at home.



Parents Are Teachers, Too

Although the teacher is responsible for teaching the subject matter, sometimes a child has trouble remembering what he learned in class. Here's what you can do to help:

- **Provide support right at home.** You can help your child review, listen to your child read or have him recite spelling words.
- **Ask for suggestions on how to work with your child.** Most teachers are glad to suggest methods and activities to use. Ask if your school has a "Homework Hotline." Find out if you can email your child's teacher. Search the Internet for homework help sites.
- **Use the teacher as a role model.** Ask to visit the classroom. Watch how the teacher works with children on reading, math and other activities. Then copy what you see.

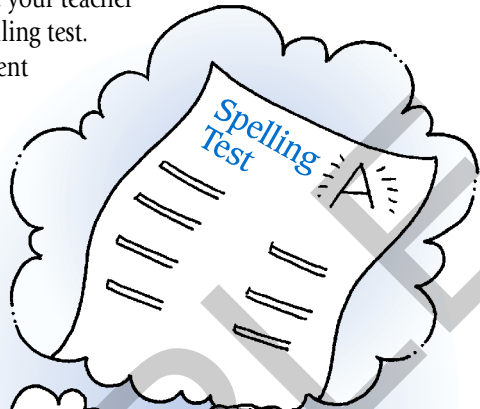
Try Proven Ways to Help Your Child

- **Help your child develop daily study goals** based on homework assignments. Setting a few small goals that your child can attain one by one works better than having one large goal. This will give her a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.
- **Be available.** Younger children need the most help. But all children need to know parents are there. So be on hand to simplify directions or answer questions.
- **Don't be too helpful.** Remember, it's not *your* homework. Don't do it for your child. Just advise and give your support.
- **Foster an "I can do it" attitude.** Praise your child for effort and when you spot something done well. Say things like: "I like the way you organized that paper," or "Lately, you're finishing everything on time!"



- **Help your child visualize success.**

For example, say, “Imagine your teacher saying it’s time for the spelling test. See yourself feeling confident because you’ve studied all the words. Hear the teacher pronouncing each word, and see yourself writing each one correctly. Then see the A on your paper.”



- **Take the fear out.**

Say, “I like the fact that you don’t fall apart when you make a mistake. There are so many things to learn. If we always worried about mistakes, we’d never do very much.” When your child makes a mistake, focus on what he can learn from it.



- **Help your child see progress.** Talk with your child about what he has learned.

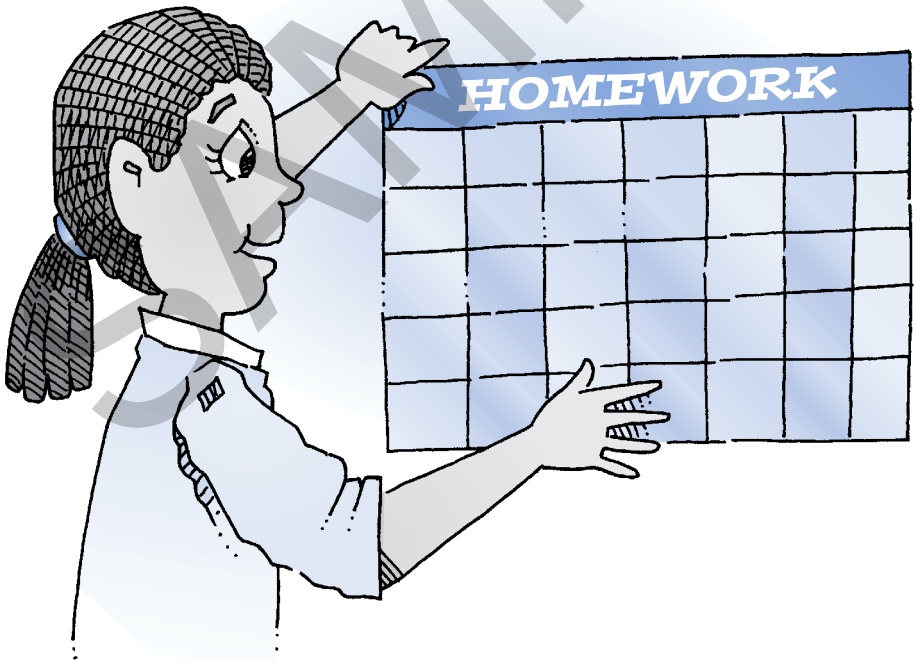
You might get out an old book and say, “Remember when you had trouble reading this book?” If your child is struggling with math, say, “Remember when you couldn’t add $6 + 9$?” Share your own excitement about his growth.

- **Be sure your child gets plenty of sleep,** well-balanced meals and lots of physical exercise. Having a healthy body will help your child learn.

Help Your Child Get Organized

Encouraging your child to get organized is another good way you can help with homework. Here are three suggestions:

- 1. Use sticky notes.** Purchase pads of self-stick notes that your child can carry to class. If the teacher assigns homework, have your child stick one on the spine of the book. Then it will be easy to see which books must go home at the end of the day.
- 2. Make a homework calendar.** A monthly calendar with large, empty squares will help your child keep track of what's due when. These are especially helpful for keeping track of all the steps for a long-term assignment.
- 3. Use a planner.** Many schools today provide planners for their students to write down assignments.



When is the Best Time for Homework?

Like adults, some kids are night owls. Others are up before the sun rises. Finding your child's "prime time" for studying may be a key to success in school.

There is no single best time for homework. Experiment to see what works for your child.

And remember, most kids (and most adults) need to take short, regular breaks so they can do their best thinking. Encourage your child to schedule brief breaks during homework time.



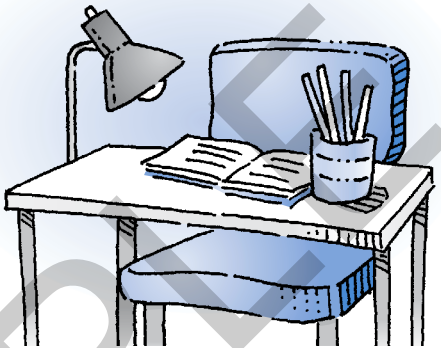
Play 'Beat the Clock'

Does your child dawdle while doing homework? One mom solved the problem by turning homework into a game of "Beat the Clock." Here's how to play:

Together, look over your child's assignment to figure out how long it should take to complete. Then set a timer allowing a little extra time so your child can achieve the goal. Challenge him to finish before the timer rings. This should help your child stay on task. Even better, it will help him realize what he can do *on his own*, without nagging from you.

Where's the Best Place To Study?

Deciding *where* to study is as important as deciding *when* to study. Start with a simple, quiet place. If your child is young, or needs supervision to stay on task, you should be nearby. Add a table or desk, good lighting and a comfortable chair. Add needed supplies such as paper, pencils and pens, erasers, paper clips, a ruler, a pencil sharpener and a dictionary.



What About Studying With Music or TV?

Sometimes it's okay for teens to study with music. But not if their grades are low or the tunes are too loud. Why? Many situations—including test taking—require working in silence. And experts agree that TV and studying do not mix. So record those favorite shows for viewing after homework is finished!

'Can I Study With a Buddy?'

Study buddies may be able to help each other when they get stuck. They may motivate each other. And students often learn more when they can talk about their answers and the reasons for them. Having someone to study with may motivate students who must study when their parents aren't around.

But studying together isn't for a child who's easily distracted. And, if both students want to talk about something other than homework—it won't work.

Suggest the 'SQ3R' Study Method

Teach your child to use the SQ3R study formula. SQ3R is a proven five-step process that makes studying a textbook more effective—Survey, Question, Read, Restate and Review.

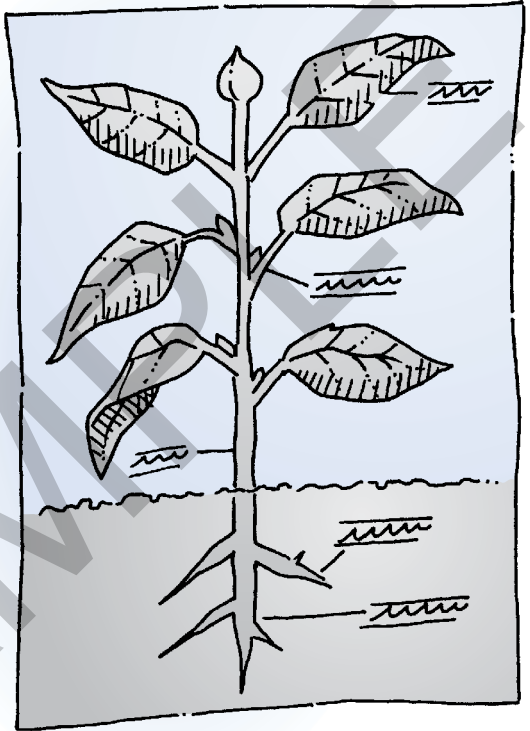
Survey. Have your child quickly look over the material to see what it's about. Skim the headings. Look at photos. Read the bold type.

Question. Once your child knows the main idea, ask him to think of questions the assignment might answer. What are the parts of a plant called? How are new cells produced?

Read. Now your child should read the assignment. As your child reads, have him look for answers to the questions he developed.

Restate. Next, have your child tell you the important parts of the chapter in his own words. What are the most important ideas covered?

Review. What were the main ideas? Did your child find answers to all his questions? What else did he learn? What surprised him? This step can be done right away as well as days later.



Taking Notes Can Help

Sometimes your child may need help to remember what she reads. Taking notes may be the answer. Here's a method you can suggest:

- 1. Draw a line, top to bottom,** down the left side of a sheet of note paper to make two columns.
- 2. Write each major text heading** from the assignment in the left column.
- 3. Summarize the text** under that heading by writing a brief note in the right column.
- 4. Do this for key words** and phrases as well.
- 5. Try to recall the information** in the right column from the headings and cues in the left column.



Here's How to 'Ace' the Test

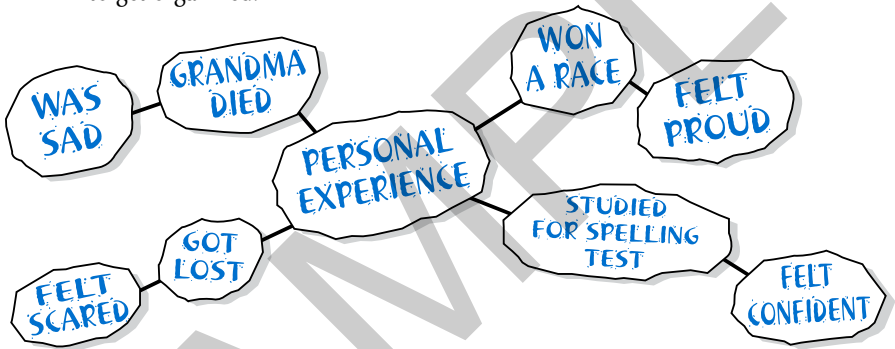
One of the best ways for your child to study for a test is to make up her own test questions. If she were the teacher, what would she ask? Have her keep in mind anything the teacher has said about the test. Will it include essay questions? Multiple choice? Will anything be stressed?

Once your child can answer her own test questions, she is ready for the real thing.

Tame Those Writing Assignments

Writing assignments are often part of a student's homework. Here are some ways you can help:

- 1. Have your child "talk through"** his ideas on the topic before starting. Clear writing starts with clear thinking. Talking with a parent can help clarify thoughts.
- 2. Encourage your child to make notes** before writing. An outline or a writing web, like the one shown, are good ways to get organized.



- 3. Offer plenty of praise.** Be as specific as you can. Say, "I really like the way you've described how you felt when you were lost."
- 4. Don't over-criticize.** Focus first on what your child is trying to say. It's helpful to point out errors now and then, of course. But if your child thinks you are always looking for what's wrong, he won't want to share his writing with you.
- 5. Encourage your child to revise and rewrite.** Experts often say, "There's no such thing as good writing. There's only good *rewriting*." But let your child do it. Don't rewrite it for him.

Help Your Child Remember Facts

For some children, memorizing things is easy. But many others need a little help. Here are some techniques that may help:

Use Mnemonics

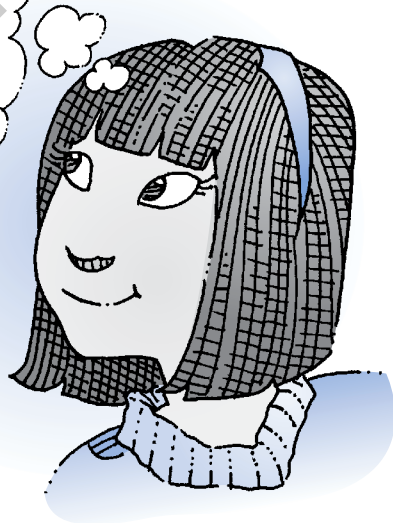
Mnemonics (ne-MOHN-iks) are memory aids. If you remember the poem, "Thirty days hath September," that's a mnemonic. If you know the names of the Great Lakes by spelling HOMES (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior), that's another.

When your child has to memorize a list, have her write the words in a vertical column down the left side of her paper. Then try using the first letter of each word to compose a new word, phrase or sentence that ties all the items together.

If your child needs to learn the planets in order of their distance from the sun, you might try this one: My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Noodles.

(Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.)

Huron
Ontario
Michigan
Erie
Superior



Have Your Child Teach You

One dad found a way to help his 11-year-old learn the states and provinces and their capitals. They switched roles—dad became the student and his daughter the teacher.

At first, this dad found he missed as many capitals as he answered correctly. As a result, his daughter spent a lot of time looking up the right answers. But after several rounds, she didn't need to look things up anymore. While having fun together, both she *and* her dad had learned the capitals.

Make a Concentration Game With Flashcards

Using flashcards is a great way to memorize a large number of facts. Whether your child is learning dates, names, new words or math facts, flashcards can help. Try this flashcard concentration game:

- **Write a word**, date or math problem on one card.
- **Write the word's definition**, date's event or answer to the math problem on another card.
- **Repeat the steps above** for each word, date or problem to be studied.
- **Shuffle the cards** and spread them out face down.
- **Take turns with your child** picking one card and trying to find its match. Let your child be the one to decide whether or not you've made a successful match.
- **The player with the most matches wins.**



And Finally, Make Sure the Homework Gets Turned In!

Once the studying is done and the homework completed, many children still need help getting the work to school. If your child's homework often gets lost or left behind, have him try this:

1. **Put each assignment** in a special homework folder as it is completed.
2. **Put the folder** in a notebook or book bag.
3. **Put the book bag** by the door before going to bed.



Have More Questions About Homework?

Do you still have questions about homework? Do you think your child has too much, or too little, homework? Do you have more questions about just what you should be doing to help your child with homework? Make an appointment to talk with your child's teacher. You may also want to talk with your school principal or counselor.

You, your child's teacher, the principal and other staff are all part of the team that helps your child learn. And your child will learn more when the team works together.

With your support, homework can be the important teaching tool it should be. Although your child should always do his own work, your help in building good homework skills can make a big difference!



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