

Homework & Study Skills

Engaging Families to Support Student Learning



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Table of Contents

Section 1 – Resource Kit Overview	1
Introduction	2
License and copyright information	3
Electronic access via the online portal	4
About the included presentations	5
Use handouts and articles to reinforce skills	6
Section 2 – Why Homework & Study Skills Matter	7
Making the case	8
Homework habits and study skills matter	11
Section 3 – Engage School Staff	18
Engage your staff in boosting homework and study skills	19
Review your school’s homework policy	20
Surveys help measure homework and study skills needs	24
Survey families’ views on homework and study skills	25
Survey students about homework habits and study skills	27
Answers to family questions about homework	29
Simple ways to involve families with homework and study skills	32
Section 4 – Engage Families	34
Engage families for student success	35
Share information on homework and study skills	38
Communicate responsibilities with a homework contract	39
Host a family event on homework and study skills	40
Tips for a successful meeting	41
Invite families to your homework and study skills event	43
Recognize family participation	44
Working with language barriers	45
Use technology to promote study skills	46
Reinforce your message with eTips	49
Enlist community support	54
Involve hard-to-reach families	55
Engage families throughout the year	56
Section 5 – Ways Families Can Help Students Develop Homework & Study Skills PowerPoint Presentations	62
Overview of presentations	63
Leader’s guide for your presentation	64
Presenter’s script – elementary level	68
Presenter’s script – secondary level	72

Table of Contents *(continued)*

Section 6 – Family Handouts & Newsletter Articles (Elementary)	76
Set your child up for homework success	77
Help your child jump over homework hurdles	78
Seven strategies help your child prepare for tests	79
Teach your child how to manage time	80
Help your child get organized for success	81
Help your child take responsibility for learning	82
Build your child’s higher-order thinking skills	83
Give your child’s listening skills a boost	84
Persistence is the key to success	85
Build your child’s note-taking skills	86
Introduce your child to different learning strategies	87
Help your child use the internet effectively and safely	88
Routines are essential for homework success	89
Equip families to help with homework struggles	90
Team up with families to ensure test-taking success	91
Time management is essential for success	92
Organization is key	93
Families can build student responsibility for learning	94
Promote the importance of higher-order thinking	95
Listening is an important part of learning	96
Share some tips on instilling persistence	97
Share tips for taking notes	98
Share learning strategies with families	99
Emphasize internet safety and responsibility	100
Section 7 – Family Handouts & Newsletter Articles (Secondary)	101
Coach your teen to homework success	102
Help your teen overcome homework struggles	103
Share strategies to help your teen prepare for tests	104
Show your teen how to manage time	105
Show your teen how to get organized—and stay organized!	106
Share eight secrets of responsible students	107
Strengthen your teen’s higher-order thinking skills	108
Help your teen improve listening skills	109
Persistence is the key to success	110
Help your teen take better notes	111
Share learning strategies with your teen	112
Is your teen using the internet effectively?	113
Routines lead to good homework habits	114
Share the right way to help with homework	115
Prepare families for tests	116
Share tips for time management	117
Share organization tips with families	118

Table of Contents *(continued)*

Families can promote responsibility for learning	119
Encourage families to promote higher-order thinking	120
Listening is essential to learning	121
Enlist families to teach the importance of perseverance.	122
Share note-taking tips with families	123
Promote a variety of learning strategies	124
Use the internet wisely and safely	125
Section 8 – Research Resources	126
Sources	127
Selected research on family engagement.	129

SAMPLE

Homework habits and study skills matter

From elementary school to high school, studying is one of students' major responsibilities. Establishing effective homework habits and learning study skills now can help them develop the independence and confidence they need to meet their goals and prepare for college and a career. As students progress through the grades, effective studying has an ever-increasing effect on their academic achievement. While there are many study skills essential for student success, this kit focuses on the areas where families have the most influence and can provide guidance.

Homework habits

Sometimes the greatest challenge of doing homework is getting started. That's why it's essential for families to help their children establish a daily homework habit that becomes as routine as brushing teeth. This includes establishing:

- **Time.** There is no single “prime” time for doing homework. Some kids are night owls, while others focus best before the sun rises. Some like to delve right in after school, while others need a break before settling down to work. As children get older, establishing a regular time can become more challenging. What works for a second grader no longer works for a tenth grader. Increased after-school activities require families and students to work out a more deliberate schedule. While homework time in the upper grades may vary from day to day, it should never be something to “fit in” around extracurricular activities. Once established, this time for schoolwork should be part of a daily routine, whether there is an assignment that day or not.
- **Place.** Traditional wisdom has been to establish a regular place for homework. It was assumed that students would become “conditioned” to studying in that spot. Their ability to focus and concentrate would then become automatic. While this may be effective for working on certain daily tasks, such as completing a brief assignment, when it comes to in-depth studying, a recent report on learning and the brain suggests that varying the studying environment can reinforce learning and help students remember what they learn. Families can observe what works best for their child. Wherever children study, the homework “toolbox” should be well stocked with necessary supplies—pens, pencils, paper, highlighters, folders, etc.
- **Strategies.** Studying for a math test does not require the same skills as writing a history essay or reviewing vocabulary words. Families can help students plan how to approach different tasks and subjects. And if students struggle, families can help them develop strategies for managing their time, prioritizing study tasks, organizing study space and schoolwork—and implementing other study skills described on the following pages.

Review your school's homework policy

When it comes to homework, it can seem as though everyone has an opinion. Some families think their students do too much; others worry that their kids don't do enough. Homework can be a source of stress for teachers, who must plan it, assess it and respond to school, student and family concerns. And students? Well, many just don't see the point.

A clearly-written school homework policy, communicated to families, teachers and students at the start of the school year, can go a long way toward getting everyone on the same page about the expectations for homework at your school, as well as the responsibilities of each stakeholder. As you review your homework policy, consider including the information in the guideline below:

1. Purpose of homework

Your school homework policy should begin with an explanation of the purpose of homework. According to the National Education Association, homework can be divided generally into these categories:

- **Practice.** This type of homework reinforces what students have been taught in class, and helps them retain, master and review the material and associated skills.
- **Preparation.** This type of homework introduces concepts that will be taught in future classes.
- **Extension.** This type of homework requires students to apply concepts they have learned previously in a new context.

Research suggests that homework's purpose changes according to grade level:

- **At the elementary level, homework:**
 - Helps students develop important study skills and habits.
 - Serves as a communication link that informs families about what their children are learning at school.
- **At the secondary level, homework:**
 - Is associated with improving academic achievement.
 - Strengthens study skills and habits, leading to college and career readiness.

Homework should not be used to:

- **Teach** complex new material that is not explained and expanded upon in class.
- **Punish** students for wrongdoing.



Survey families' views on homework and study skills

What do families know about homework and study skills? Do they know how to build them in their students? A survey can help you find out. A customizable version of this resource, which you can adapt to your needs, is available in the online portal.

(School Name) Homework and Study Skills Family Survey

*We are committed to building our students' homework and study skills, but we can't do it without your help! Your answers to this survey will help us target our efforts to improve student skills and provide you with tips and strategies to support your child's learning at home. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey, and return it to school by **(survey due date)**. Circle your responses or fill in the blanks. Your individual responses will be kept anonymous.*

1. How important do you think homework is to your child's learning?
 - a. Not important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Important
 - d. Very important
2. Does your child have a regular homework and study time?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. On average, how much time does your child spend each day on homework and studying? _____
4. Where does your child do homework and study at home?
 - a. At a table or desk used just for studying
 - b. In a space shared with other activities
 - c. Other (please specify) _____
5. Does your child write assignments in a planner or notebook?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. How often do you review your child's assignments?
 - a. Never
 - b. Occasionally (once per week or less)
 - c. Often (several times per week)
 - d. Daily



Reinforce your message with eTips

When you have important information to convey to families, it helps to do it in as many ways as possible. That's where eTips can help. You can use these short, practical tips to remind busy families of the many ways they can support their children's homework efforts and boost their study skills. Establish a schedule to post these eTips using your choice of digital communication: email, social media, texts, your school website and your family portal.

Elementary eTips

Remember the ABCs of homework success

Homework success can be as simple as ABC (D and E)! A is for Attitude. Model a positive attitude toward learning for your child. B is for Breaks. Break up long study sessions into smaller chunks. C is for Choice. Let your child choose what to work on first. D is for Directions. Your child should read them carefully, then restate them. And E is for Encouragement. Find positive things to say about your child's efforts.

Support your child's homework habit

Helping with homework doesn't mean doing it for your child. Instead, try these tips: 1. Provide a well-lit, well-supplied study area. 2. Set a regular time and place for homework (without TVs, phones and loud music) so your child will develop a homework habit. 3. When your child has to memorize basic facts, make up games that help. 4. Help connect what your child is learning in school to life outside school.

Concentrate on study goals

Setting goals for each study session can help your child focus and avoid distraction. At the beginning of the next study session, help your child set a goal of what to accomplish in 10 minutes of studying. Set a timer, and at the end, check and see if your child met the goal. Then, set another goal for the next 10 minutes. Brain researchers know that children learn more in two short study sessions than in one long one.

'I can' is more important than IQ

Success in school—and nearly anything else—depends more on effort than ability. Motivate your child by stressing that “It's not how smart you are, but what you do with what you have that counts.” Remind your child over and over that success comes with persistence. And when your child is successful, be sure to say, “You see? Hard work paid off.”

File that homework under O for organized

If your child wasn't born organized, here's one way to make sure homework assignments come home from school. Give your child a large envelope labeled “homework.” Whenever the teacher gives out a worksheet or other sheet of paper to be used for homework, your child puts it in the envelope. After your child completes the homework, it goes back in the envelope to go back to school.

Be your child's 'study buddy'

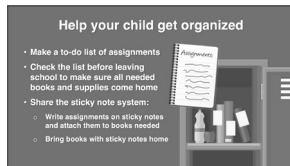
Having a “study buddy”—someone by their side as they work—can help some children learn. To be a positive study buddy: 1. Help your child organize information for a report or quiz. 2. Show your child how to break larger tasks down into smaller steps. 3. Listen as your child reads aloud. 4. Make sure your child understands homework instructions. 5. Compliment your child's efforts and small improvements.

Presenter's script – elementary level *(continued)*



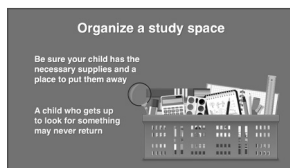
Slide 5

An easy way to help your child establish effective study habits is by setting a daily homework time. **[+]** Some kids want to get their homework done right after school. **[+]** Others need a little time to let off steam before settling down. Find a time that works for your family and allows your child to concentrate. **[+]** While your child is working on math problems or writing a book report, show your support by working, too: **[+]** You could cook dinner or complete another chore. **[+]** Keep the TV off during this time and limit screen usage to school-related work. **[+]** Offer motivation by asking questions about what your child is learning. This shows that you think school is important, and that you want your child to learn.



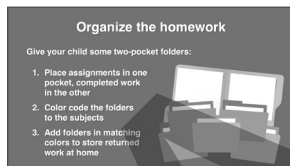
Slide 6

You can also help your child get organized. **[+]** The first step is to make sure your child keeps a list of everything needed in order to complete assignments each day. A small notebook or calendar that fits in a backpack is a good place to keep the list. **[+]** Your child should check the list before leaving school—otherwise, the math notebook may be at school when it's time to study at home! **[+]** Some students keep packages of sticky notes in their desks. **[+]** If a teacher assigns homework, they write the assignment on a note and stick it to the spine of their book. **[+]** This method makes it easy to see which books need to go home in the backpack.



Slide 7

A little organization in your child's study space will also make homework go more smoothly. **[+]** Be sure your child has the necessary supplies, such as pencils, paper, a ruler and a dictionary, on hand. **[+]** A child who gets up from studying to find the colored pencils may never return. If your child studies in a shared space (such as the kitchen table), keep school supplies in a large box. At the end of the study session, your child should put everything back in the box until the next session.



Slide 8

For students who often lose assignments between home and school, two-pocket folders can help. **[+]** In one pocket, your child can keep assignments that need to be completed. Once the work is complete, it is moved to the other pocket. **[+]** Color coding makes it even easier to stay organized. Everything for writing goes in a green folder, while math papers go in blue. **[+]** Adding a set of folders in matching colors at home will allow your child to store old tests and completed homework until they are needed for test review.



Slide 9

Teach your child that **[+]** homework is not finished until it is in the backpack and the backpack is by the door. **[+]** Take five minutes at night to be sure your child has everything needed for school tomorrow. Otherwise, your child may get to school without the homework, library books or musical instrument.

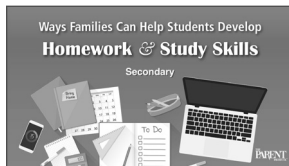


Slide 10

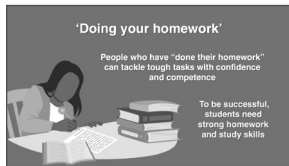
Just as organizing your child's physical space is important, so is organizing study time. Here are some basic tips for time management: **[+]** At the start of each study session, help your child make a list of the things to accomplish. **[+]** Then, encourage your child to check each task off when finished. **[+]** For some students, it's helpful to start out with the toughest task to get it over with. For others, starting with easier tasks gives them the confidence to attack the more difficult ones. Help your child figure out what works best.

Presenter's script – secondary level

This presenter's script provides suggested wording for the *Ways Families Can Help Students Develop Homework & Study Skills* secondary-level PowerPoint presentation found in the online portal. You are, of course, free to modify the script to make the words your own, adding or deleting information as you choose. You may make changes to the PowerPoint as well. Please note, however, that under the copyright license for your Resource Kit (see Section 1), you may use the modifications only for your own personal presentation use. The presentation is written to run for about 12 minutes, depending on the speed at which the narrative is delivered.



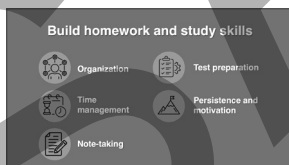
Slide 1
(Opening slide, no narration.)



Slide 2
Hello and thank you for coming to school today. We are going to talk about the importance of strong homework and study skills—but really, we're also talking about how you can help your teen be more successful in and out of school. Did you ever think about how we describe people who show up prepared and ready for a task? We often say, "They did their homework." People who have "done their homework" are able to tackle a tough task with confidence ... and competence. That's exactly why building strong homework and study skills is such an important part of your teen's learning.



Slide 3
Research confirms that your involvement can have an impact on your student. Not only can involved families help increase academic achievement, but they can also help teens develop:
 [+] A positive attitude about homework and school.
 [+] A positive image of their own ability to do well in school.
 [+] A greater awareness of how they can solve problems for themselves.
 [+] And a better understanding of how to make the most of their homework time.
 One of the most important things you can do to help your student with homework and studying is to offer encouragement. Even a simple statement like, "You're working hard—I'm proud of you" can mean a lot when your teen is in the middle of a history essay.



Slide 4
Here are some specific ways you can help your teen develop homework habits and skills such as [+] organization, [+] time management, [+] note-taking, [+] test preparation, [+] and persistence and motivation.



Slide 5
An easy way to help your teen establish effective study habits is by setting a daily homework time. While your teen is reading about World War I, [+] show your support by working, too: You could cook dinner or complete another chore. [+] Keep the TV off during this time [+] and limit your teen's screen usage to school-related work. [+] Motivate your teen by asking questions about assignments. This shows that you think school is important, and that you want your teen to succeed.

Seven strategies help your child prepare for tests



It's such an awful feeling that many adults never forget it—arriving at school unprepared for a test. Prevent this from happening to your child by reinforcing effective study habits. Encourage your child to:

1. Seek information

Your child can't prepare for a test without knowing what it will cover. When the teacher talks about an upcoming test, your child should listen carefully, take notes and ask questions if necessary.

2. Make a study plan

Help your child schedule time to review for the test. Spread the work over several days. Then, help your child make to-do lists for each study session. Include time for study breaks.

3. Use study tools

Encourage your child to use:

- **Flash cards.** These are perfect for learning key words, facts and definitions—and makes it easy for students to quiz themselves.
- **Practice tests.** Your child can make up questions about the material or try to answer the questions at the end of an assigned reading.
- **Mnemonics.** These memory aids can help students remember information. Your child can use a word, a funny name, letters that rhyme or even a funny sentence. Many of us learned HOMES, the time-honored acronym for the names of the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).

4. Study under test conditions

Encourage your child to study without distractions. In other words, no TV, cell phone or blaring music! Another idea is to set a timer during practice tests to make them more realistic.

5. Have a bit of fun!

Find ways to make studying fun. Why not turn your kitchen table into a giant study guide? Cover the table with paper and have your child write the key facts all over the table. Your child will be able to review while sitting at the table eating breakfast.

6. Prepare physically

Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep the night before a test and has a healthy breakfast in the morning. Suggest dressing in layers so your child won't be distracted by how hot or cold the room feels.

7. Reduce anxiety

Test anxiety often comes from self-doubt. If your child doesn't think he will succeed, he probably won't. Encourage positive self-talk. When stuck during a test, your child can say, "I know this. The answer will come to me." Talk about your child's strengths and demonstrate how to visualize success. With eyes closed, your child should imagine how great it will feel to know all of the answers.



Families can build student responsibility for learning

Putting children in charge of their at-home learning is an important way for them to build their sense of responsibility. Remind families that when children complete assignments and prepare for school on their own, they develop a sense of competence and self-discipline.

Help your child take responsibility for learning

Just as adults go to work each day, so do students—and their “job” is school! From being at school in the morning to completing homework each day, students need to understand that school is their priority and that it is their responsibility to be ready to learn each day.

You can build your child’s responsibility when it comes to:

- **Attendance.** Your child needs to be in school on time every day—alert and ready to learn. Help your child use checklists and establish routines to get together everything needed for each school day, including completed homework, lunch, signed forms and other essential items.
- **Homework.** Make your child responsible for knowing which assignments need to be completed and when. You can help with organization, but it is up to your child to complete the work. Teach your child to use a calendar, and make it clear that you expect assignments to be turned in on time.
- **Getting ready for the day.** Put your child in charge of tasks like making lunch and setting an alarm clock. Demonstrate how to do these things, and then make them your child’s responsibility. Soon, your child will get in the habit of being prepared for school each day.
- **Prioritizing school above all else.** Remind your child that schoolwork comes before screen time or other recreational activities, and that you expect your child’s best effort.

Strengthen your teen's higher-order thinking skills

Higher-order thinking skills help students assess, evaluate and see relationships between events and ideas. And one of the best places to support your teen's budding thinking skills is right at home.

Recognize signs of advanced thinking

Teens are learning to think in a more complex way. They have begun to develop:

- **Advanced reasoning skills**—the ability to think about multiple possibilities and hypothetical situations.
- **Abstract thinking skills**—the ability to think about concepts that can't be physically touched, like ethics.
- **Metacognitive skills**—the ability to think about how they process information and feelings.

Support decision making

Teens exercise their thinking skills when they make decisions. Share this five-step process with your teen:

1. **Identify the problem.** Ask your teen to state the problem.
2. **Think of all possible solutions.** Tell your teen not to judge whether the ideas are good or bad—just keep thinking.
3. **Think of the pros and cons** of each solution. In this process, teens may identify additional solutions that are better than the ones they've listed.
4. **Make the decision.** Now your teen has to choose a solution to try.
5. **Evaluate.** How did your teen's solution work? Should your teen make changes?

Have thought-provoking conversations

To help your teen further develop thinking skills:

- **Ask**, "What do you think?" at least once a day. Encourage your teen to share thoughts about everything from the day's news to your family's weekend plans. Then, ask, "Why do you think that?" and encourage your teen to explain.
- **Encourage your teen** to back up conclusions about issues using evidence from books or websites.
- **Encourage involvement** in positive causes your teen feels strongly about.
- **Look at a news article** headline together. Then, read the story. Talk about whether the headline did a good job of explaining what the story was about. Did the facts in the article support the headline?
- **Pick a commercial** to talk about when watching television. What information does the commercial want the viewer to believe? How does that compare with the truth?
- **Talk about facts** (established truth) and opinions (a person's beliefs). Ask your teen to tell you whether a statement is fact or opinion, and why.





Share tips for time management

Students lead very busy lives—between homework, after-school activities, jobs and more, they have a lot on their plates! Families can help students learn to manage their time wisely so that they can get their work done efficiently and completely.

Time management is essential for success

As students get older, it is important for them to learn to manage their time in order to balance all of their priorities. This is especially true when it comes to schoolwork. Making the most of available time will allow your teen to complete assignments, study, participate in extracurricular activities—and relax!

Encourage your teen to:

- **Use one big calendar.** Help your teen put assignments, practices and games, and other events on a wall-sized calendar. Your teen should break major projects into small chunks, with a deadline for each.
- **Estimate the time needed to complete an assignment.** When there is a paper to write or a test to study for, have your teen estimate how much time the task will take. Then, your teen should record how long the task actually took. Now your teen will know how much time to budget for future assignments. Suggest building in some extra time, just in case.
- **Prioritize work.** At the start of each study session, have your teen write down tasks to do and mark the ones that take priority. For example, your teen shouldn't spend time writing flash cards for next week's test when there is a paper due tomorrow.
- **Use little bits of time.** Five minutes here or there add up! Encourage your teen to keep notes or flash cards handy—to review while waiting for the bus or before practice.