

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting Take the Hassles out of Homework!

BY KIM DeMARCHI



Now that we are into the swing of the new school year, it's back to Homework Time for the kids. But homework can be as much work for parents as it is for children! Hassles

can take many forms: stress, arguments, refusing to do it, sibling conflict, making lots of mistakes, dawdling, "I need help...", etc... It usually becomes so frustrating and upsetting for the parents at this point.

I suggest that parents try to change their mindset about what a chore homework is with their child. If parents start to see homework as an opportunity to reinforce valuable and necessary life skills, it will really help change the way they respond to the task of homework in their home. Most people think of life skills being responsibility, work ethic, time management, organization and problem solving, but it goes beyond just that. They are called Executive Functions. Executive functions are basically the cognitive skills that help us manage our lives and be successful. Parents should be trying to develop these functions in their young children and the vehicle they can use is HOMEWORK! These skills need to be taught, just like learning to read. Once the skills are habits, they can be transferred to all of life!

What are the 8 Executive Functions?

1. **Emotional Control** - handling frustrations
2. **Inhibition** - impulse control, interrupting, taking turns

3. **Initiation** - starting homework and projects
4. **Organization of materials** - spaces and materials accessible and able to be used efficiently
5. **Planning/Organization** - completing and turning in assignments, juggling schedule
6. **Self Monitoring** - staying on topic, not making careless mistakes
7. **Shift** - transitioning from one thing to another, adapting to new situations
8. **Working Memory** - following directions, note taking, retaining information

What are some ways you can internally motivate your child to do homework?

1. Find out what the child's goals are.
2. Ask questions to help the child determine how those goals can be met. Get them involved!
(ie: How much time to do think you'll need to study each day? Where do you want to study? What conditions do you need to be most effective? What materials do you want in your space? What planning assistance do you need? (calendar), Where will you keep completed homework?)
3. Have the child determine the consequences for forgetting to do/ turn in homework, not sticking to the study schedule, if a goal is not met.
4. Have the child write an agreement with all of the above.
5. Encourage!

When my children were younger, I set up homework time with them simply by

collaboration! We discussed when they wanted to do it, and they decided after they had a snack. We talked about where they would do it. They agreed that they wanted to be sitting at the kitchen table, free from distractions like TV and noise, but with good lighting. We made sure that the area was stocked with all necessary supplies they might need, pencils, erasers, crayons, colored pencils, paper. We discussed that just as they have their work, I have my work. I'd try to read, pay bills, open mail, file, etc... at the same time. I was accessible to them. I provided guidance, not answers. I'm the advisor, not the assistant. I watched for signs of frustration or fatigue and gave them necessary stress breaks. After a maximum of 18 min. of stress, productive effort is at a minimum. Let them do something they are good at or particularly enjoy, such as shooting hoops, dancing, building with Legos, or drawing. I helped them learn to break big assignments into smaller more manageable chunks.

All children are different, so not every strategy will work all the time with every child. Some kids do better with light music in the background, while others need complete silence. Some need to take frequent breaks with jumping jacks and others might be distracted by frequent stops and will require uninterrupted work times. Some can sit anywhere, others may need to bounce on a yoga ball. Some kids aren't intimidated with a math sheet with 40 problems on it. Some will feel less anxious by folding it in half. Some children do better when chewing gum or on ice chips. Some work faster with snacks on hand, while others should snack before they begin. Some, use snacks as a reward, as in



the case with my daughter recently. A couple weeks ago, my daughter had a bunch of pages to read in a daunting book and was in her room reading. I walked in to check on her and she had a bowl of grapes and a small bowl of chocolate chips. She told me that she was rewarding herself after each few pages she read with the treats. It was so great to see her taking responsibility for her own learning, and setting herself up for success. My son will give himself breaks by shooting hoops. Believe me, our homework strategies have evolved over time, with adjustments along the way. In 6th and 7th grade, my kids wanted checklists every day after school of everything to be done. Now they are making their own checklists!

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