



Community Contributor

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## **Myths about Homework**

### **Myth #1 - Fostering Independence**

One of the myths that I hear most often is: “Well, if I help my child with homework, he will never learn to be independent. Therefore, he should do it himself.” I cannot stress enough, the importance of the role-modeling that you as a parent can do. You are one your child’s most powerful role models for learning, along with the teacher in the classroom. And when you work with your child on homework, your example of how you think through a problem, how you think through an organizational model of how you are going to go about the assignment - can be vital for your child.

Helpful suggestion: As you work with a child on homework, you may do homework alongside him. This is called parallel work. When you are introducing a new skill, let us say it is long division, and he is having a little bit of difficulty, you can talk about the problem, go through the steps and then, as you start an example, both of you can work on the same problem and then you can compare answers. This is totally different from just telling him if he is right or wrong, because when you compare answers, if his answer is not correct, you can go back and find what step he had trouble with and catch him where he had the difficulty.

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Sometimes, if a student is having a long homework night and there are so many assignments to do in one night that you’re wondering if he’s going to go past his bedtime, you may even do work in terms of sharing. Let’s say he has forty math problems and that isn’t his only assignment! Maybe he does the even and you do the odd. Are you doing it for him? Yes. But, on the other hand, you are requiring accuracy maybe at the 90% level on the problems he’s doing. The idea is for him to understand the concept and be able to do it independently. Quantity is not necessarily the goal. . So, on occasions when your child is overloaded with homework and you

know he won't get to all of it, isn't it better to at least get part of the assignment done well than having him carelessly go through at break-neck speed just to get done? Think about that.

### **Myth #2 — Don't Use The Dictionary For Spelling!**

Another myth is that if my child can't spell a word, he or she should look it up in the dictionary. Now, if you really think about that as a logical demand, it won't make sense. If you can't spell a word, how can you look it up in the dictionary? The purpose of the dictionary is to find meanings and pronunciation and word derivations.

Helpful Suggestion: Therefore, when I work with a child and he cannot spell a word and he's in the middle of writing a thought down, I tell him exactly how to spell the word so as not to interrupt the thought process of what he's trying to express. Then, I do something that will help for the future. I have a recipe box and some 3x5 cards. Every time I have to give him the spelling of a word I jot it down on a card. Then, on another night when he's not so bogged down with homework and we have time to work on his spelling, those are the words we work on. Those are called his "functional" words. They're words that he chooses to use when he's expressing himself in writing. If you don't do this, what will happen is that he'll think of another word. If he can't spell that one, then he'll say, "What else can I use there?" Pretty soon, he might pick a "one cent" word instead of a "five dollar" word just based on spelling when actually he has an excellent vocabulary but can't spell the word. This is not to replace the spelling list that he has at school, this would be something in addition – these are his "functional" spelling words. So, add a recipe box with some 3x5 cards to do this.

Another Suggestion: Another aid that you can have if he has trouble with spelling is an electronic speller. At this time, they're very inexpensive and very, very useful. When you're not there to help him, he can type in the letters of the word as he thinks it is spelled and then see the correct spelling. If he's doing his work on a word processor, be sure to have a spell checker and that way he also can have his work checked without you sitting next to him.

### **Myth #3 - Study Area**

The next myth is that the study area must be quiet. No TV, no radio, no CDs, no tapes. In truth, there are some people who when they study cannot concentrate when it is quiet. In fact, studying in a library, where it is really quiet, would be the most difficult place for them to concentrate. Some of us need a "sound background". Recent studies have shown that in many cases the best sound background is classical music. This seems to stimulate the brain so that the student can concentrate without being distracted. In some situations, maybe classical isn't going to work. Find something that would be "white noise" to your child. You might be jarred by it, but they won't! They're used to their type of music. There is one caution; use orchestral music without words when they're doing reading because the lyrics could be distracting. During math, this doesn't appear to happen. There can be lyrics when they're doing math. If you have a teenager and you are trying to use some leverage to get them to do their homework, they'll be amazed if you let them do this. The criterion, of course, is - Does, it work for them?

The next myth that abounds is that every student should do their homework in their room at a

desk with a lamp, sharpened pencil, and a dictionary at their side. In fact, for many students, the best place to do homework is in the hub of the family home, at the kitchen table. “Isn’t this distracting?” you might think. Consider this. When a student is sitting in his room with the door closed, quiet, doing his homework, he begins to think that he is the only person in the whole wide world doing homework at that moment. All his friends must be having fun - they’re doing something other than homework. It makes them feel burdened.

What works in the kitchen, number one, is that they can’t get off task - you’re there to bring them back to what they’re supposed to be doing. They could sit up in their room, no TV on, no stereo on, quietly sitting and twiddling their thumbs. You come back and they haven’t gotten much further than when they started. But in the kitchen, you can keep an eye on them and get them back on task.

In addition, you’re right there when they have a question. If a child has to come from his room with a question to find you in the kitchen, on the way down he has to pet the dog, see what’s on the TV, and maybe get a snack, and now his homework time is interrupted. You’re available to answer his questions, if he is in the kitchen with you.

When you do homework monitoring with a child, you don’t have to sit down right next to them. Sometimes they resent having somebody right there breathing down their neck as they’re doing their homework. But they like you available. One of the things you can do to set an example that “they’re not the only person working” is to take some time to balance your checkbook, to write a letter, to do something you were going to do anyway and then you’re working and he’s working - you’re both doing something at the same time, but not necessarily the same thing.

#### **Myth #4 - The Designated Parent**

The next myth is that either parent is equally capable of helping with homework. Unfortunately, this is not true. One parent may be able to work better than the other with homework in general, or with a particular child and their homework. It involves tolerance level, rapport, patience, and knowledge of the subject area that the homework assignment is covering. I have often referred to a “designated parent”-- just like a designated hitter, you can have a designated parent. Kids know! If I ask one of my students, “If you had trouble with math, who would you ask to help you?” they know which parent they would ask. So don’t feel embarrassed if there is something that you don’t feel as capable of helping with. Divide up the tasks: You do the things that you feel you can do the best with that child and let the other parent do the rest. If you’re a single parent and you do not have that option, you may want to involve a tutor.

#### **Myth #5 - Teachers in the Parent Role**

The next myth: Teachers should automatically be able to be good homework helpers to their own children. If you’re a teacher, you know this isn’t necessarily true. It’s ironic that you can help other people’s children all day long and when you come home, sometimes your patience working with your own children is quite strained. Sometimes a teacher/parent might have difficulty differentiating between their roles as instructor and as parent helper. In that case, again, a tutor may be helpful or the other non-teacher parent can help.

### **Myth #6 - When to do Homework**

The next myth is that it is best to do homework as soon as the child comes home from school, get it out of the way, and then have playtime. Think about it. When you come home from work and you have extra work to do at home - paperwork perhaps - when you come in the door, is that the first thing that you do? No! And it's not the first thing that may be appropriate for your child to do either. They need some time to get a snack, go outside, and even mindlessly watch a TV show just to unwind. Allow them some amount of time to unwind so that they can be ready for homework. Remember that they've just had a whole day of schoolwork. So, eating, relaxing, and some physical exercising should all take place before homework. Make a game plan for when children come home. Look at the pile of homework and see how much there is and estimate about how much time needs to be spent on each assignment. Then 'decide on the priorities. Make a schedule - see if you can't still fit in one of their favorite TV programs or time for them to talk on the phone - something that's important for them.

### **Myth #7 - A Night on For EVERYONE**

The last myth is, if a student doesn't have homework to do, he or she should study each night anyway. If a student gets work done at school because they're given time at the end of a class period or they have a study hall and they come home without homework, to them it's a punishment for you to think up something that they should do. .Maybe it would be a worthwhile activity, but rather than assign work when the teachers did not at school, it is now the time to allow them to do their own thing.