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Homework Doesn't Have to Be a Battle of Wills

By Barbara Snyder M.A. Education

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Homework. It doesn't have to be a daily battle of wills between child and parent. There are several strategies and elements that a parent can use to maximize an opportunity to support a child's education and to massage the parent/child bond. For the parent, it is a way to understand what is going on at school and an opportunity for communication. Simply put, a parent has the ability to guide a child to positive feelings about education and to the rewards of good efforts.

Teachers need to have parents on their side, not for the teacher's benefit, but for the child's. When a parent gets involved and stays involved on a routine basis, this catapults the child to another level. A parent who reads to a child, models life-long learning, participate in school events and monitors homework time is doing his or her job of setting up the child for success.

The Five Essential Elements of Helping Your Child with Homework are: knowing the homework basics and the whys; knowing how to set up a proper environment; knowing how to monitor a child's work; knowing how to provide the appropriate guidance; and knowing how to communicate with your child's teacher.

Essential Element # 1 – Homework Basics

Getting to know the basics of homework, the ins and outs of the process, is critical. Think of it as a perfect platform for a parent to be involved, in a very meaningful way, in a child's education. Think of it as one of the greatest challenges that a parent can ever face. Finally, think of it as an everyday routine that needs to be a primary function of family life.

Think about the reasons for homework to begin with. This is ammunition for a parent when responding to the typical child question, "Why do I have to do homework?" Homework helps the child do the following things: reviews previous learning; provides opportunity to practice; readies the child for the next lesson; expands reference skills using the library and internet; supplements and extends learning; provides opportunities for exploring subjects in more depth; helps the child become an independent worker; and allows for exploring individual interests. Keeping these lofty goals in mind will help a parent

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when the child starts to balk from time to time. Patience and perseverance is the mental state that parents must adopt. Staying in a positive mode, along what might prove to be a bumpy road, is the preferred approach.

Essential Element # 2 – A Proper Homework Environment

If a child believes that a parent cares and that there is a good reason to complete assignments, the child will value education and the routine of homework. A child needs to see that homework is as essential to education as training is to an athlete.

There are several considerations, which provide a great deal of flexibility, when setting up a good homework environment for a child. A parent should work with a child to make some of these decisions

together. Research shows that the following areas need to be addressed: schedule a priority time, which may need to flex if there are dance lessons, sports teams, etc.; choose a specific place that is comfortable and works for the family; minimize distractors, such as TV; organize school supplies and materials; be a good role model by reading, playing educational games, and other appropriate activities; and show interest in what the child is working on.

Essential Element # 3 – Monitoring the Homework Routine

How closely a parent should monitor the homework time will vary from child to child. Those who do not work well independently will, of course, need intensified monitoring. Teachers may have varying views on the parent's monitoring role. It is imperative that a parent talk with the child's teacher to get an understand of the best way to support the child at home. A "never, never rule" is that you never do your child's homework.

Being available for and in close proximity to the homework area is important. At the end of the homework time, a parent needs to thoroughly check to see that the assignments are complete. Asking the child what they were supposed to do and having them explain the assignment is a very effective way to wrap up the summary portion of the homework routine. This can also be a good way to start the session if the child tends to procrastinate about getting down to the assigned tasks. A parent should always be alert to teacher comments that may be on homework and other school papers. These can be red flags for the parents.

Essential Element # 4 – Providing the Appropriate Guidance

Supporting homework routines includes the appropriate guidance in scheduling other activities. Left to their own devices, most children will choose TV or video games over homework. There is a place for the television watching and the game playing, but a parent and child need to formulate a limited time for these. Homework has to be the priority.

Some of the specific techniques in guidance can include the following: encourage independence in completing homework; assist the child with organization skills, such as using folders; reinforce good study skills; help with practice and drills, for example multiplication flash cards; help the child learn

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about budgeting time to complete all tasks; talk about the assignments with the child; and provide praise throughout.

Essential Element # 5 – How to Communicate with the Classroom Teacher

A parent should contact the child's teacher if the following issues arise: directions for homework are not clear; the parent can't provide the necessary materials and supplies; the child is overly disorganized; the assignments are too easy or difficult on a consistent basis; and the child has missed several days of school and is behind on a massive amount of work.

As early as possible, contact the child's teacher when there is a problem. A parent should take some notes to the meeting in order to be specific about what problem needs to be addressed. Work together to find a solution. It is important that whatever is agreed upon that the parent and teacher monitor the results. If there is no change after 3 or 4 weeks, the parent should follow up with another meeting request. Don't let things go wrong too long.

The homework environment does not have to be a battleground. However, it can easily turn into one if

the parent does not see the big picture and take control of the situation. A parent needs to seize this daily routine as an opportunity to be involved with the child and to be the child's number one supporter for school success. Here's a chance for a parent to give a meaningful gift to a child – a positive attitude toward responsibility, independence and educational accomplishments.

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Potty Training Battle of the Wills

By Danna Henderson

Some children practically potty train themselves, while others struggle and resist against the potty. Potty training should never turn into the battle of the wills. If it does, both you and your child will lose. When dealing with strong-willed child, it's best to turn potty training into a game. Use the following suggestions to make potty training fun and exciting for you and your child:

Musical Potty Chairs – Musical potty chairs, like the Tinkle Toonz, use positive reinforcement by playing

a tune to reward your child for a job well done.

Potty Training Dolls – Dr. Phil recommends that parents purchase an anatomically correct drink & wet doll for potty training. Both the Corolle and Aquini potty training dolls can be used with Dr. Phil's method. By helping your child teach the doll to use the potty, your child will learn without realizing it.

Potty Training Charts & Stickers – Potty training charts and stickers can go a long way to motivate your child to use the potty. At first he may need a reward each time he sits on the potty. Eventually you will need to restrict rewards to actually using the potty. When your child uses the potty consistently, stickers can add up to a bigger reward for a specific number of accident free days.

Potty Training Watch – Some children don't want their playtime to be interrupted for frequent potty breaks. However, if you have a fun way to remind your child to take a potty break, he will probably be more receptive. Try a potty training watch, such as the VibraLite, which can be set to vibrate every 30 minutes to 1 hour to remind your child to sit on the potty.

Potty Training Targets – Potty training targets are a great way to teach boys how to aim. They come in a variety of colors and shapes, the potty training targets can also be used to teach colors and shapes.

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Danna Henderson started ZIP Baby in order to provide parents with comprehensive potty training information as well as a large variety of potty training products. For more information about potty training, visit

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