

Handling Homework Headaches

Have you ever had to coax (or coerce!) your child to the homework table? For some, this is an exhausting daily battle, leaving both parent and child frustrated and upset. Here are 4 strategies to help alleviate the power struggle:

- **Establish a homework routine – pick a time and stick to it!** After school, children should have 45 min-1 hr of free time to have a snack, play (preferably outside), TV, etc. Physical activity will energize them for homework. Elementary-aged children should finish their homework in the afternoon, before dinner. The later it is, the more tired the child, the longer it takes to get homework done. If needed, build in scheduled breaks for older children, especially if there are attention issues. Also, build in choices: let them decide what order to do assignments, or set up the homework space, to give them ownership. This helps to motivate children and reduce power struggles.
- **Establish a protected homework space** at the kitchen table, a desk, or home office. Have bright lighting and no distractions. Younger children should work nearby, to keep them on task or answer questions. Do they need a task-master or are they able to focus and work independently? Each day, *before* beginning homework, parents should **check folders/agendas** to verify and discuss homework (even middle-schoolers). You will also be cognizant of curriculum and school events, and your child's teachers will love you for it!
- **Have supplies:** pencils, crayons/colored pencils, scissors, glue stick, and markers, in a pencil box. Older kids need a ruler, tape, lined and construction paper. Supplies should be kept at the homework desk. If working at the kitchen table, have a crate or bin to store materials. Ideally, the area should have a bulletin board or white board (dry-erase) with a calendar to track longer assignments or due dates. Younger students can use it for sight words, math problems, or new vocabulary.
- Finally, **keep technology out of sight**—no phones/tablets nearby.

Another component of a homework plan can include the use of incentives. It can be as simple as a fun activity afterwards or the withholding of the activity until homework is done. For older children set specific academic and/or behavioral goals, and together, decide the rewards. Penalties can also be built in, i.e. the loss of a privilege. A point system can be used, with a menu of rewards, so children

have the choice of immediate gratification or saving points for a larger reward. It is important to understand that any system you use will probably have to be tweaked to fit the nature and personality of your child.

With older children, a contract can be written between parent and child. It should define roles/responsibilities of both with incentives or penalties. When kids help develop a contract, they are more invested in the success of it and likely to adhere to guidelines. This can reduce tension between parent and child. Keep in mind—parents must agree to a contract they can live with, even when accountability becomes inconvenient. Also, be ready to accept that most contracts will have to be revised/rewritten.

Lastly—**be consistent!** Children rely and thrive on consistency and gives them a sense of security and confidence. Creating a routine and sticking with it, removes the stress surrounding homework, making life so much more enjoyable for your whole family!