

# Parenting Tip of the Month

## October



Lower Elementary Teachers

# Help Your Child with Homework (Without Doing It Yourself)

Sometimes you run out of patience; sometimes you run out of time; sometimes you just want to make sure your child is successful. Whatever the reason, it's easy for parents to overstep when it comes to homework.

But completing your child's homework ultimately doesn't do her any favors — in fact, there's evidence that a high-level of parental involvement with homework can actually backfire. Instead, parents should recognize that homework exists to help children master key concepts they are learning in class. Letting kids figure it out for themselves, including making mistakes along the way, is an important part of the process. Beyond the academic benefits, allowing a child to complete homework without mom or dad's interference helps him gain important life skills like self-sufficiency, problem solving and time management.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't be involved at all. The key is to provide support and guidance while setting firm boundaries and reinforcing that homework is your child's responsibility, not yours. Try these seven strategies to help your child do her homework without doing it for her.

## **Set up a homework routine.**

Help your child get assignments done with less angst (or tears) by setting up and maintaining a homework routine. Figure out when your child is best able to concentrate — that may be right after school or scheduled activities, or he may need an hour of downtime at home before tackling academics. If your child spends time with an after-school sitter or in an after-care program, decide how much homework should be completed during that time.

You'll also need to designate a location in your home where your child can work with minimal distraction. Some children thrive at a desk in their bedroom, away from siblings and other family members; others happily and productively work at the dining room table or kitchen island while mom or dad makes dinner. Whatever spot works for your child, make sure school supplies are within reach.

Most importantly, homework time needs to be free of television, video games, cell phones and other media. If your child needs to access to Internet for certain assignments, make sure the computer is in a communal area. Set boundaries around which sites your child can visit, and determine together how much time actually needs to be spent surfing the Web.

## **Determine your involvement based on your child's age.**

It's natural for parents to be a bit more involved when young elementary school students are still new to the concept of homework. At this age, parents or a caregiver should sit down with the child to review homework and make a plan about how to tackle it. Your child needs to be an active participant in this conversation, which will help them learn how to prioritize without you.

By the time children are in junior high and high school, parents should be largely removed from the nightly homework process. Instead, be available as needed to discuss 'big picture' details on assignments and projects.

## **Don't hover during homework time.**

Be a resource when it comes to homework, not a crutch. Give your child space while she completes her homework. Do your own thing — make dinner or send work emails — but be accessible. This will encourage her to try to solve more difficult problems on her own before seeking your help.

### **Review good study habits.**

Completing homework assignments and having good study habits aren't necessarily the same thing, especially as children get older. Study habits include understanding how to review classroom material, take notes, stay organized and prepare for long-term projects and exams.

Parents can help teach and reinforce good study habits. Try these suggestions:

- Talk to your kids about how these skills relate to the real world. Good study habits early on can set a student up for academic and professional success.
- Model the behaviors you want to see in your child. While you don't need to start pouring over a physics textbook, let your child see you balance the monthly budget, read books for pleasure, work on a big professional project or even manage the family calendar.
- Support study habits by being present and available. Run through flashcards, administer practice questions and actively listen when your child wants to talk about the material he is learning.

### **Focus on healthy habits.**

For children in the United States, it's not uncommon to have several hours of homework each night as they advance in school, in addition to after-school activities, sports and other commitments. While making time and space for homework to happen is important, other habits, like sleep as well as a healthy diet, can contribute to a child's academic success.

According to National Sleep Foundation, first graders need up to 11 hours of sleep a night, while junior high and high school students need at least 8 hours. Over time, without sufficient sleep, kids' attention spans and ability to concentrate are likely to decrease. Set a bedtime for your child and stick to it. If homework is interfering with your child's ability to get enough sleep, it may be time to talk to the teacher about whether or not the volume of homework is reasonable.

### **Figure out what the sticking point is.**

Kids learn in different ways and at different paces. Suggest and try different methods to figure out what type of learning works best for your child. For example, if your child is struggling with algebra, try drawing a diagram or a picture to see if a visual representation will clear things up.

If a child continues to have trouble with certain subjects, he may have missed a key foundational concept from earlier lessons. No amount of "toughing it out" will work in these situations, so you may need to review materials to determine what information needs to be reviewed. Enlist help, either from a teacher or a tutor, if your child needs additional support and one-on-one attention.

### **Communicate with the teacher.**

You and your child's teacher are a team dedicated to your child's academic success — and like all relationships, communication is key.

When your child has an issue with homework, resist the urge to take over and talk to the teacher instead. Teachers don't want parents completing their students' homework, and they typically know when a parent has intervened on an assignment. If your child is consistently struggling with her work, she may need extra help. The teacher can provide this help or assist you in identifying the right resources.

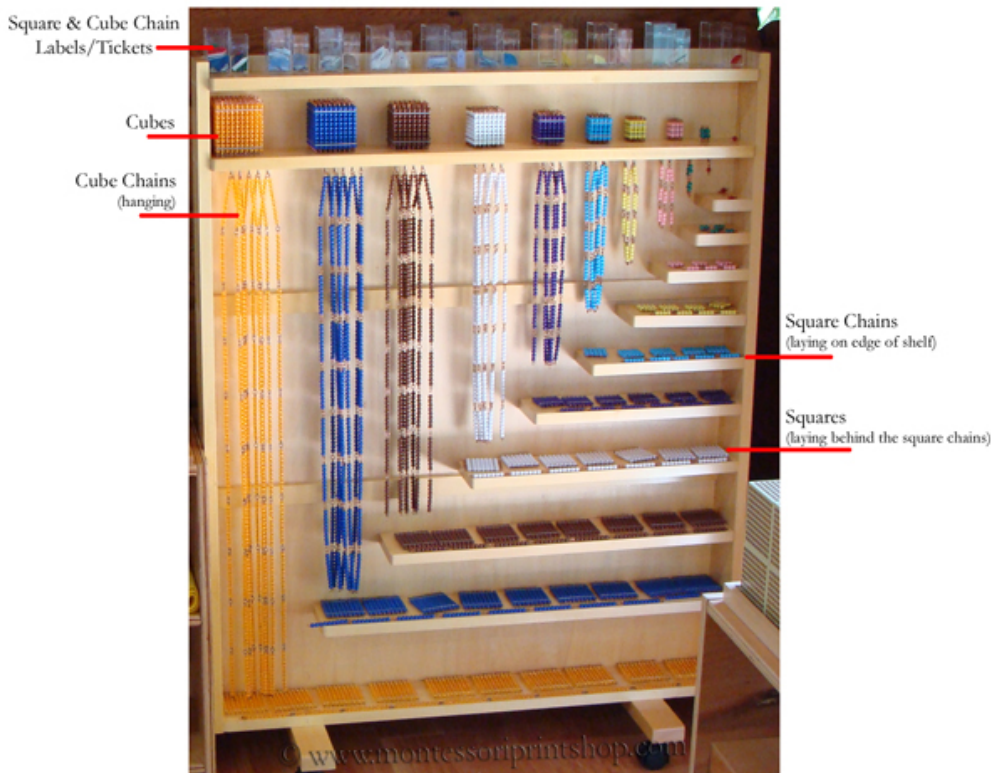
In addition, if you're concerned about too much homework (or even too little homework), reach out to the teacher. Whatever the problem, be diplomatic — your child will be with this teacher for an entire year, so it's important to keep the lines of communication open and productive. Together, you'll likely be able to solve whatever homework issues arise.

# Material of the Month

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Lower Elementary Teachers



## Math Curriculum

The Montessori method of teaching math to Lower Elementary students is revolutionary. The curriculum takes the children from manipulating the concrete materials, to doing math in the abstract form with pencil and paper. Each work is sequenced so that the child builds upon a concept learned in the previous work. The child is taught division using the stamp game,

so the concept of HOW division works is established first—the child can SEE how they are dividing up one number by another number, by manipulating the concrete material. It is only after the concrete materials are introduced and learned that the child moves to the abstract, computing in their head or using pencil and paper only.

One of the most interesting facets of this curriculum is the variety of materials available to learn the same concept. For example, addition, one of the first and most basic concepts taught in Lower Elementary Math, is usually initially taught using the golden beads, then using the stamp game, then the snake game and so on, until the process is completely understood. All of these materials provide the child the opportunity to learn addition. The same is true for subtraction, multiplication and division—there are several works that can be used for the same process until it is completely understood. Multiplication can be taught with the stamp game, then the bead frame, then the checkerboard, then the golden bead frame, each work adding a concept (such as an additional digit). If one particular work doesn't capture the attention of a student, there surely is one that will. Finger charts are used to aid in memorization of math facts, and makes what is usually a tedious duty, fun! Fractions and decimals also have specific, concrete works to guide the children in grasping these difficult concepts. The geometry materials, which include, but are certainly not limited to; the exploration and study of lines, angles and shapes, capture the attention of the children easily.

In the math curriculum, the child is given an isolated item to learn, one concept at a time so as to not overwhelm—to help the child maintain order and learn in a progressive fashion. If a child has not mastered one work, another one using the same concept is offered, so that by the time they are ready for the next step, success is ensured, which in turn makes the child feel happy, and proud of him or herself.

# Math Montessori Materials

