



**Are you trapped in a nightly homework struggle with your child?** The list of excuses can seem endless: "I don't have any homework today." "My teacher never looks at my homework anyway." "That assignment was optional." "I did it at school." If only your child could be that creative with their actual homework, getting good grades would be no problem!

Pre-teens and teens often insist they have no homework even when they do, or tell parents that they've completed their assignments at school when they haven't. If your child's

grades are acceptable and you receive positive reports from their teachers, congratulations – your child is doing just fine. James Lehman advises that students who are doing well have earned the privilege of doing their homework whenever and however they see fit. But if their grades reflect missing assignments, or your child's teachers tell you that they're falling behind, you need to institute some new homework practices in your household. For those classes in which your child is doing poorly, they lose the privilege of doing homework in an unstructured way. For the classes they are doing well in, they can continue to do that homework on their own.

Trying to convince your child that grades are important can be a losing battle. You can't make your child take school as seriously as you do; the truth is, they don't typically think that way. Remember, as James says, it's not that they aren't motivated, it's that they're motivated to do what *they* want to do. In order to get your child to do their homework, you have to focus on their behavior, not their motivation. So instead of giving them a lecture, focus on their behavior and their homework skills. Let them know that completing homework and getting passing grades are not optional.

If you're facing the rest of the school year with dread and irritation, you're not alone. By following the tips below, you can improve your child's homework skills *and* reduce your frustration!

## **5 Strategies to Get Homework Back On Track**

### **Schedule Daily Homework Time**

If your child often says they have no homework but their grades are poor, they may not be telling you accurate information, they may have completely tuned out their teacher's instructions, or need to improve some other organizational skills, for example. The Total

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Transformation Program recommends that whether your child has homework or not, create a *mandatory homework time* each school day for those classes in which your child is doing poorly.

Use the "10-Minute Rule" formulated by the National PTA and the National Education Association, which recommends that kids should be doing about 10 minutes of homework per night per grade level. In other words, 10 minutes for first-graders, 20 for second-graders and so forth.

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It will be most effective if you choose the same time every day. For example, you might schedule homework time for the classes that your child is doing poorly in to begin at 4:00 p.m. every school day. If your child says they have no homework in those subjects, then they can spend that time reading ahead in their textbooks, making up missed work, working on extra credit projects, or studying for tests. If they say "I forgot my books at school," have them read a book related to one of their subjects. By making study time a priority, you will sidestep all those excuses and claims of "no homework today." If your child has to spend a few days doing "busy work" during the daily homework time, you may even find that they bring home more actual assignments!

### **Use a Public Space**

It's important to monitor your child's homework time. For families where both parents work, you may need to schedule it in the evening. In many instances it may be more productive to have your child do their homework in a public space. That means the living room or the kitchen, or some place equally public where you can easily check in on them. Let them know they can ask for help if they need it, but allow them to do their own work. If your child would like to do his or her homework in their room, let them know that they can earn that privilege back when they have pulled up the grades in the subjects in which they are doing poorly.

### **Use Daily Incentives**

Let your child know that they will have access to privileges when they have completed their homework. For example, you might say, "Once you've completed your homework time, you are free to use your electronics or see your friends." Be clear with your child about the consequences for refusing to study, or for putting their work off until later. According to James Lehman, consequences should be short term, and should fit the "crime." You might say, "If you choose not to study during the scheduled time, you will lose your electronics for the night. Tomorrow, you'll get another chance to use them." The next day, your child gets to try again – observing her homework time and earning her privileges. Don't take away privileges for more than a day, as your child will have no incentive to do better the next time.

### **Work towards Something Bigger**

Remember, kids don't place as much importance on schoolwork as you do. As you focus on their behavior, not their motivation, you should begin to see some improvement in their homework skills. You *can* use your child's motivation to your advantage if they have

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something they'd like to earn. For example, if your child would like to get his driver's permit, you might encourage him to earn that privilege by showing you he can complete his homework appropriately. You might say, "In order to feel comfortable letting you drive, I need to see that you can follow rules, even when you don't agree with them. When you can show me that you can complete your homework appropriately, I'd be happy to sit down and talk with you about getting your permit." If your child starts complaining about the homework rule, you can say, "I know you want to get that driver's permit. You need to show me you can follow a simple rule before I'll even talk to you about it. Get going on the homework." By doing this, you sidestep all the arguments around both the homework *and* the permit.

### **Skills + Practice = Success**

Tying homework compliance with your child's desires isn't about having your child jump through hoops in order to get something they want. It's not even about making them take something seriously, when they don't see it that way. It's about helping your child learn the skills they need to live life successfully. All of us need to learn how to complete things we

## **Skills + Practice = Success**

Tying homework compliance with your child's desires isn't about having your child jump through hoops in order to get something they want. It's not even about making them take something seriously, when they don't see it that way. It's about helping your child learn the skills they need to live life successfully. All of us need to learn how to complete things we don't want to do. We all have occasions where we have to follow a rule, even when we disagree with it. When you create mandatory, daily homework time, you help your child practice these skills. When you tie that homework time to daily, practical incentives, you encourage your child to succeed.

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