

HANDOUT 2.1

How to Set Up a Good Homework System at Home

Homework is both an opportunity for adolescents to learn and for parents to be involved in their adolescent's education. It is also an opportunity for parents to teach their adolescent that learning can be fun and education is important. When adolescents know their parents care about homework, they have a good reason to complete and turn in their assignments.

Why do teachers assign homework?

- ✓ To review and practice what has been taught in school.
- ✓ To prepare for the next day's class.
- ✓ To learn to use resources (library, reference books, etc.).
- ✓ To explore subjects in greater depth than time permits in class.
- ✓ To teach adolescents to work more independently.
- ✓ To encourage self-discipline and responsibility.

How can parents be most effective in their help?

1. **Set expectations:** Parents must communicate clearly to their adolescent what the expectations are for his or her homework behavior. They may seek their adolescent's input (their adolescent may help decide the homework time or spot), and they should provide an opportunity for their adolescent to ask questions. However, the parent must remain in charge of the homework process, even as the adolescent remains responsible for the homework itself. As adolescents become more responsible regarding their homework, they may require less parental monitoring.
2. **Assist adolescent in bringing home assignments and necessary materials:**
 - ✓ Provide an adequate backpack or other method of carrying materials.
 - ✓ Provide the necessary assignment book.
 - ✓ Check what was brought home as early as possible.
 - ✓ Help your adolescent organize any returned papers and forms that are sent home. It is helpful to have a binder to keep at home in which completed assignments that need to be saved can be kept. A separate system might be arranged for forms, permission slips, etc. An in-box or corkboard can be set up so that paperwork can be completed by parents and returned to school as needed.
3. **Identify a time and place where homework will be done each day:** Setting a consistent time for homework is a good idea. This time can be modified if necessary but consistency is important. If your adolescent is not used to completing homework during chunks of time, you may need to begin with setting 15 minutes as a goal and gradually increasing the time allotted to 45 minutes or an hour. Talk to your adolescent's teachers about how long homework assignments are expected to take. Similar to time, it is a good idea to identify an area in which homework will be completed. This area should be organized so that homework can be accomplished there. (Continues on next page).

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This requires privacy, a writing surface, a place to store materials, and a place to put finished work so it will not be forgotten the next day (perhaps a backpack). **Make sure to check that your adolescent has placed the completed assignments in his/her backpack and knows where to find them.** The homework place does not have to be fancy, but should be in a quiet area and should remain consistent from day to day. A special box for materials and an expectation that homework be done at the kitchen table is often all that is needed.

4. **Remove distractions:** Turn off the TV and radio, and do not allow social telephone calls, texting, or non-academic use of the internet. All family members should engage in quiet activities during homework time. If there are young adolescents in the home who may be noisy, remove them from the homework area. If distractions cannot be eliminated, consider changing the location of the homework area (e.g., library).

NOTE: Some adolescents actually focus better with some background noise, so you may need to individually tailor rules and structure.

5. **Set a homework time:** Issues to be considered here include:
 - The adolescent's schedule (e.g., most alert, fewest conflicting interests).
 - The family's schedule (e.g., parent's work schedule, dinner time).
 - Parents' personal schedules (e.g., meeting, activities, sleep).
 - Siblings' schedules (e.g., when are they most likely to not disrupt the adolescent's homework time).
 - Potential distractions (e.g., favorite TV show, opportunity to engage in outdoor activities while it is still light, community activities that they would like to be involved in).
 - The amount of time required to complete homework.
6. **Review assignments:** At the beginning of each homework session, help your adolescent set up each academic task and review the instructions with your adolescent.
7. **Provide supplies:** Pencils, erasers, paper, dictionary, glue, stapler, calculator, pencil sharpener, scissors, and a ruler should all be kept nearby. Keep all supplies together in one place if possible. If you cannot provide supplies, check with the teacher, school counselor, or principal about sources of assistance.
8. **Set a total duration for homework** (e.g., 45 minutes). This rule should be standard unless there is a change in the normal routine. Modify the time in accordance with times in which a lot of homework was assigned or when there is only a small amount of homework assigned. If your adolescent works very hard but does not complete the assignments, you must evaluate what is not working (e.g., Is the teacher assigning too much homework? Is your adolescent not working productively? Does your adolescent have a specific problem that needs to be addressed [e.g., attention, reading]? Each problem will call for a different plan of action.
9. **Set a good example:** Read, write, or do other activities that require thought and effort.

10. **Show an interest:** Talk with your adolescent about homework assignments. Take your adolescent to the library for materials. Most importantly, read with your adolescent.
11. **Vary the structure:** Whatever your adolescent's age, if your adolescent is having difficulty completing and turning in assignments that previously caused no difficulty, it is probably time to increase supervision and structure.
12. **Be available to help during homework time:** Being present during homework time has the advantage of increased monitoring and provides your adolescent with a source of assistance and support. If you cannot be present during homework time, utilize resources that are available to you in your community to help (e.g., enroll your adolescent in an after-school program, ask friends or neighbors to help, call home to check on your adolescent's status, provide your adolescent with small rewards for homework done in your absence).