

Review and Renew Homework Routines

At the beginning of each school year, students are typically inspired to achieve all that they can. They have colorful new folders, pencils with clean erasers, and stylish book bags for transporting everything to and from school.

Before the end of first semester, however, enthusiasm sometimes wanes. Holiday schedules have disrupted the daily routine. Extracurricular activities take up hours a week of family time. Shorter days and longer nights of winter confuse sleep rhythms and energy levels. Dedication to homework routines tend to fizzle.

The beginning of the New Year is a perfect time to review your children's homework strategies and efforts and to encourage them to renew their commitment to their homework routines. Here are some suggestions to recharge the homework routines in your home:

- **Recognize the reasons for homework.** Your children might complain that homework is *"a waste of time; you never use this in real life."* You might wonder, yourself, about the value of some of the work your children are assigned, but don't express your doubts to your children. Questioning the teacher's work plans in front of the children can undermine what the teacher is trying to do. Instead, remind children that homework has a variety of purposes: skills practice, preparation for upcoming lessons, skills evaluation to make sure skills can be transferred to new situations, and creative thinking. Reserve your own doubts or concerns until you talk to the teacher. Call or visit the classroom. The teacher will be happy to know that you are interested in how your children are learning.

- **Restore and enforce the routine.** Talk with your children and agree on a homework schedule that suits your children's work style and energy levels. Some children like to come straight home from school and get homework out of the way so that they have closure on the academics of the day. Other students need a break after school to have a snack, chat, or be alone in their rooms for a short time to unwind. Avoid associating completion of homework with access to the TV, which might lead to distraction or rushed assignments. Also, avoid scheduling homework late in the evening, before bedtime, when children are less alert.
- **Restock the homework station.** Most students work best in a quiet, well-lit setting free of distraction, television, and interruptions. Keep study tools on hand to prevent wasted time during study times. Depending on the age of the children using them, study areas might need to be stocked with crayons, pencils, erasers, glue sticks or paste, lined paper, and plain paper. Have text resources (such as a dictionary, thesaurus, atlas, and encyclopedia) easily accessible. Teach children to organize with a pocket planner or calendar that can go from homework station to school desk on a daily basis.
- **Respond to requests for help, but not too much.** Be available to help with homework if you can, and check in with children occasionally. Don't force children to work with you, don't provide the answers whenever the children seem to be struggling, and don't be tempted to do the work for your children. When you help too much, students don't learn as well,

and they will begin to feel incapable and will give up trying. When help is requested, provide clues or pose leading questions to guide children to find solutions themselves.

- **Reinforce the idea that your child is capable.** Praise good work habits such as perseverance, effort, and good organization. You might say, "You've been working really hard on this assignment. I bet you'll feel really proud of yourself when it's done." When checking work, make positive suggestions, "Those first three problems look great. I think, if you redo some steps of the last two problems, you'll quickly find the mistakes." Don't nit-pick about the non-essentials. If a child is really struggling with fractions, don't fuss about a few messy eraser marks on the paper. Display papers that you are proud of (not just perfect papers) on your refrigerator or elsewhere in your home.
- **Communicate with teachers.** Make contact with the teacher(s) if your children are making frequent and consistent errors or if homework becomes an ongoing struggle. Teachers have resources and experience in helping find learning solutions for all types of students and their differing learning styles.

Kid troubles? Call the Student Assistance Program and arrange to talk to a counselor. Contacts are confidential within legal limits and available at no cost to students and their family members.

Call (515) 244-6090 or (800) 327-4692.
TTY: (515) 288-9022 or (877) 542-6488.