

# *Homework Survival Guide*

## **A Place to Work**

- **Find the right place.** In some families, having a central location, where all children in the family do their homework works best. This may be the dining room or kitchen table. In other families, each child has her own study place, usually at a desk in the bedroom. What works for you depends on your children. Some kids do best under the watchful eye of a parent, in which case the dining room or kitchen may work best. Others need the quiet of their bedrooms to avoid distractions. Some kids like to work with the radio on (and this helps them focus), while others do worse with this kind of background noise. Think about possible distractions that will need to be avoided (a nearby television, the telephone, etc.) when planning your child's workspace.

## **Organizing Homework/Setting Priorities**

A homework session should begin by reviewing what the day's assignments are. It is probably a good idea to draw up a list of assignments on a separate sheet of paper, so that you can then help your child prioritize and break down longer tasks into shorter ones. The steps to follow might be:

1. List out assignments.
2. Make sure the child brought home the necessary books, work sheets, etc.
3. Break longer tasks into sub tasks.
4. Check to see what other tasks the child has to do which should be included on the list - including long term assignments, and tests later in the week for which the child should begin studying. Add these to the homework list.
5. Have the child decide what order she will complete the work. A good rule of thumb is to have the child begin and end with assignments she considers "easy," sandwiching more difficult assignments in between.
6. Estimate how much time it will take to complete the work.
7. Make sure you have allowed enough time for the child to complete all his homework allowing for break time as necessary.

Sometimes it is difficult for kids to complete homework because of other obligations they may have - sports events, doctors' appointments, scout meetings, chores, family events, etc. You may find it helpful to put together a weekly calendar to keep track of these activities. Once a week (Sunday afternoon sounds good), sit down with your child and fill out (or review) the weekly calendar together. Then, as you plan your homework time each day, you can reference this calendar to allow time for the other activities your child is involved with.

## **Getting Started**

Some children may want to start with the hardest task first to get it over with, and this is acceptable unless the child has a very difficult time getting started and will dawdle or avoid the difficult assignment even though it was his/her choice to start with it. For many youngsters, just getting started on homework seems like an insurmountable obstacle. We have several suggestions for handling this problem:

1. Have the child specify exactly when she will begin her homework and then reward her for getting to work within five minutes of the time she has specified.
2. Sit with your child for the first five minutes to make sure he gets off to a good start.
3. Talk with your child about her assignments before beginning. This is particularly true for youngsters who may have difficulties with verbal fluency or word retrieval.
4. Orient your child to his assignment: walk him through the first one or two problems or items to

- make sure he understands what he is supposed to do.
5. Build in a short break relatively quickly, if getting started is a problem.

## Getting Through It

Make sure adequate breaks are built in. Many children have a great deal of difficulty working for long stretches of time on homework without a break. Better to plan for a two hour homework session with frequent breaks built in than to try to cram homework into a one-hour, non-stop session. You can use a kitchen timer to keep breaks to a reasonable length (e.g., 5-10 minutes). Breaks might be used to get a snack, play a few minutes of a Nintendo game, or to shoot baskets or do some other form of exercise. Breaks should be scheduled when tasks get accomplished rather than after a set period of time, otherwise your child can daydream the time away and still get his break. One child we know arranges homework sessions between TV shows he likes to watch. Thus, his schedule on any given day might look like this:

- 4:30 math
- 5:00 TV show
- 5:30 language arts
- 6:00 dinner
- 6:30 social studies
- 7:00 TV show
- 8:00 science
- 8:30 TV show
- 9:00 bed time

\*\* If he hasn't finished whatever task he was working on when his television program comes on, he either misses the program or tapes it to watch at a later time.