

## Parents Have Homework, Too.

No parent would choose to give his or her child an inferior gift, or a gift that would be harmful in any way. The gift of a good education is a most valuable one. What can parents do to contribute their part to this gift? The teachers (school) have one very important part. The child has a very important part. Parents have an equally important part. Without the parent's part, the education will not measure up.

In short, parents have homework. The home is where it all begins. Parents are the head of the home. The head of the home provides, teaches, reinforces, and enforces. If the head of the home does not fulfill its obligations, no other agency can fill in the gap. The child carries with him/her everything that is absorbed in the home. First of all, parents must supply the basic needs of the infant, including food, shelter, clothing, love, and security. By the time the child has reached school age, parents have done lots and lots of "homework." However, the assignment is just beginning.

When the child begins school, the parent's role takes on a new dimension, that of enhancing the "formal education." That is, the education that is provided by the school. A parent's role in the education of his child has many dimensions. A parent's "homework" carries with it many responsibilities. These responsibilities include keeping the proper attitude toward education and school, supporting/helping your child, setting healthy priorities, consistency in discipline, rewards and consequences, open communication, helping with work missed during sickness, being active in school matters, and controlling your child's school attendance.

**Attitude.** It begins with attitude. If you have a positive attitude toward school in general, your child will also have a positive attitude. If you have concerns about the school or the teacher, be very careful how you voice these concerns in front of your child. Your child will pick up on your attitude, adopt it as his or her own, and take it to school. Negative and apathetic attitudes are at the root of a large portion of discipline problems at school.

**Support.** Your child cannot go it alone. When he or she has a particular assignment that may require special help or supplies, you are the one s/he turns to for help. Be there with all the support and help possible. There may come a time when your child will need extra help on schoolwork. If you cannot provide this help, speak to your child's teacher about it. There may be some remedial materials, or the teacher may be able to help you and your child work through the problem. You may consider outside help, such as a tutor. Arranging the schedule in the home to accommodate quality "homework" time/place is one aspect of support. Your child will need to feel secure in the fact that you will be there helping.

**Priorities.** In order for education to come out on top, it must be given top priority. This must be a true commitment in light of the many interesting and beneficial activities that are available for the youngsters. These include sports, scouts, music/dance lessons, and other activities. Too many activities will bring down the educational level of your child. This should be closely monitored during the school year.

**Consistency.** Whatever your methods of discipline, consequences, and household management, consistency is the key. When you promise a consequence, follow through. Be firm. Try not to be influenced by your child's persuasive tactics. Children consistently test authority. Be prepared to follow through each time. Results, while not always immediate, will be forthcoming. Children are just that - children. Although they are learning to accept some responsibility, they are not yet adults, and should not be treated as such. This is their time in life to learn things like consistency and priorities, and it is your "homework" to instill these qualities in your child. Children need to know that their poor choices create consequences.

**Rewards and Consequences.** Worthwhile rewards may help reinforce responsible actions. However, rewards do not have to be in the form of costly material gifts. Rewards may be in the form of time spent together, a special word of praise, or a chance to skip a chore. Just let your child know how proud you are of him/her. Consequences should fit the misbehavior as much as possible, and should be done immediately, when possible. Try not to become emotional when you discipline your child, and be sure to let the incident go. "Forgive and forget." If you remain hostile toward your child after disciplining him/her, you are distancing yourself from your child. Make sure you are still "available" to your child.

**Communication with your child.** Talk with your child. Listen to your child. Make casual comments about what he/she is saying to show that you are listening. Do not "put words" in his/her mouth about what went on in class. If your child has an unpleasant story to tell you, do not make it worse for him/her by becoming visibly upset. This will only upset the child even more. Let your child tell the story in his or her own way, in his or her own time. If you resort to an "interrogation", you will likely get the story from a biased point of view. If the problem persists, call or write the teacher.

**Communication with your child's teacher.** Keep the lines of communication open. Check your child's agenda daily. This is the teacher's best method of communicating with you. Always go to the teacher with any problems before going to the principal. You and the teacher are on the same side - the side of your child. The teacher wants your child to succeed. Make a friend of the teacher.

**Missed Work.** If your child is absent due to an illness, he or she may need extra attention from you in order to get caught up on assignments missed. Your child most likely has a given number of days

to get the work done and turned in. If the illness is prolonged, you may call the school for assignments, but be sure to make every effort to see that the work is actually done. This extra effort on the part of your child's teachers is very time consuming, and the time is taken from their planning or from their classes. This practice is one that is encouraged if you plan to see that your child does the work. If you have an occasion in which your child cannot complete a daily assignment because of a family emergency, write a note to the teacher asking for a one day extension. It is likely that your child will have consequences at school for missing work. "Homework" for the parents is to instill the importance of school assignments in your children.

**Be involved.** Show your child that you want to be involved in his or her school. Whenever you get notification of a school meeting, or a school need, show that you are interested. Participate in various activities at school. If there is a school event, show up with your child.

**Child's Attendance.** You, as the parent have the power to control your child's attendance, including being on time. Poor attendance and tardiness directly affect a child's school success in numerous ways, emotionally as well as scholastically. Please understand that signing out is the same as being absent. Your child will miss vital instruction. Instruction continues up until dismissal. When you sign your child out unnecessarily, you are telling your child that school doesn't matter. Restrict sign outs to sickness of the child, or a true family emergency. "Homework" for you as the parent is to keep your child in school.

Yes, parents have "homework". Your homework continues as long as you are responsible for your child. Without your part, your child's school experience will not be all that it can be. Together, let's prepare the "Gift" of education for your child!

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