



# Homework Summary

## Why Homework?

Children/teens ages 11-14 years old will have to manage a larger and more complex workload and need new study skills. This will take a whole new level of planning and organization. These homework assignments can become your daily challenges if you don't create regular routines with input from your children/teens in advance, clarify roles and responsibilities, and establish a plan for success.

**Tip** These steps are done best when you and your child/teen are not tired or in a rush.

**Tip** Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

## Step 1. Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Ask:
  - *"When is the best time for you to do homework?"*
  - *"What are things (like having a snack, taking breaks) that help you get your homework done?"*
  - *"I know you've missed completing assignments in the past. What helps you stay on top of homework and what gets in your way?"*
- Experiment to figure out your plan. We all have different energy cycles and times when we feel better able to focus, so work on discovering that rhythm with your child/teen, and you'll go a long way toward setting them up for success!
- Keep homework time sacred and consistent. If you are consistent, it serves as a predictable, non-negotiable process. Your child/teen knows what to expect and when to expect it.
- Take note of the time when your child/teen has said is their best time to do homework. Set a timer to go off at that time.
- Set up a space. Work with your child/teen to get the space ready.
- Make it fun!
- Create a family homework rule.

## Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- When your child/teen calls you over to ask about a problem, ask:
  - *“What is your guess about the answer?”*
  - *“Is there another place you could find the answer?”*
  - *“Is there another way to think about your answer?”*
  - Share your curiosity and interest in the subject but do not provide an answer.
- Lead your child/teen to resources.
- Research together. Be certain that you allow your child/teen to drive the process. You might ask, *“What should we look up or search for together?”*
- Teach the essential “brain break.”
- It’s a common challenge of homework time - particularly for middle school age students - to want to avoid failure and fear making mistakes. In reality, because homework is practice, it is intended as a time to try out an answer, get it wrong, and try again.

**Tip** You do not need to be subject matter experts EVER! Ask yourself how you can provide the guidance and support for them to answer the question or solve the problem themselves (even if they get it wrong).

**Trap** Though you may make comments you feel are empathizing with your child’s/teen’s predicament, be careful! Criticizing the work assigned, the teacher who assigned it, or the school’s policies will become demotivating for your child/teen. After all, why should they work hard if you don’t agree with what’s been assigned?

## Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use *“I’d love to challenge you…”* statements. *“I’d love to pose a challenge to see if you can focus on math homework for the next seven minutes. Let’s set a timer.”*
- Do a “brain break” dry run.
- Recognize effort using “I notice…” statements. *“I noticed how you got to work this afternoon when the timer sounded without my asking - that’s taking responsibility!”*
- Proactively remind in a gentle, non-public way. You may whisper in your child’s/teen’s ear, *“Remember what we can do next to figure out the problem? What is it?”*

**Trap** Resist the temptation to nag. Children/teens may require more time to work on an assignment than we feel is necessary. But, they need the time they need. Be sure to wait long enough for them to show you they are competent. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to do what you need them to do.

## Step 4. **Support** Your Child’s/Teen’s Development and Success

- Promote a learning attitude.
- Ask key questions when your child/teen struggles. *“It looks like you feel stuck. Is there another way you could approach the problem? How are you feeling about homework tonight?”*

- Coach on communications. “*Seems like you are having trouble figuring this problem out and cannot find the answer in your resources. Are there resources we haven’t thought about? This would be a good time to ask your teacher about this problem. How might you ask for help?*”
- Stay engaged. It can be motivating for a child/teen when a parent does their own paperwork alongside them keeping them company.
- Allow for and reflect on real world consequences. If you see a mistake on your child’s worksheet, don’t correct it.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

**Trap** If you groan that it’s homework time, surely they will groan as well. Become aware of your own reactions to homework. Be sure that the tone and attitude you bring to homework is one of digging in, being curious, and learning.

**Tip** A research study noted whether mothers’ comments during homework completion were controlling or supporting autonomy and competence.<sup>1</sup> The researchers concluded that those children/teens who brought worries about their ability to perform had a heightened sensitivity to their mother’s comments. Moms who supported their autonomy – “*I know you can do it!*” – and demonstrated that they believed in their child’s/teen’s ability to do the work showed increased achievement over time. However, those mothers who were more controlling in their comments – “*I need to check your work. That’s not right.*” – fostered less engagement and lower achievement in their children.

## Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. “*I noticed you not only completed your homework but turned it in as well - Yes! Excellent.*”
- Recognize small steps along the way. Find small ways your child/teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, “*We’ll get our business taken care of first with our homework, and then we’ll take a bike ride.*” Include high fives, fist bumps, and hugs as ways to appreciate one another.

## References

<sup>1</sup>. Fei-Yin Ng, F., Kenney-Benson, G.A., & Pomerantz, E.M. (2004). Children’s achievement moderates the effects of mothers’ use of control and autonomy support. *Child Development*. Vol. 75, 3, 764-780.

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