



HOMEWORK

Do You Take
More Responsibility
Than Your Child
Does?



by Carey A. Heller, PsyD

AS A PSYCHOLOGIST who specializes in ADHD and executive function issues, I often focus on issues around homework when I meet with parents and their child or teen.

During conversations about homework, I often find myself wondering, “Is the parent more invested in the homework getting done than the child?” In fact, I actually often vocalize this very thought to parents and their child or teen, because it gets them thinking about how they approach homework at home.

In theory, a student gets assigned homework assignments at school, and the expectation is that he or she completes the homework at home and turns it back in because it is their responsibility or obligation to complete the assignments. Technically, there is usually no direct expectation that parents are going to be actively involved in the homework process, except with younger children. In reality, parents oftentimes help as needed, which is perfectly fine; in many instances, they become a case manager for the child or teen to ensure that the homework is getting done and to their standards.

Taking on too active of a role early on and maintaining that same role as a child becomes a teen (and in some cases even a young adult) becomes problematic. It makes it harder for them to take responsibility for their own work, may lead to decreased intrinsic value in completing assignments, and, among other issues, can lead to increased conflicts between parents and children or teens. In situations where homework leads to excessive stress and even anxiety in parents, this is definitely a red flag that adjusting the situation may be helpful.

The needs of every child or teen will vary to some degree in terms of how much assistance he or she needs with homework. A good goal to strive for is to assist with using tools or methods that ultimately help the child learn to manage homework autonomously (aside from asking for assistance as needed). Here are some general suggestions for the role that parents should play as well as how much responsibility a child or teen should have in doing their own homework broken down by stage of development.

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH SECOND GRADE

- Have child preview assignments with parents to make sure he or she understands what to do.
- If your child is able to stay on task, have him or her work for set intervals (five to ten minutes, until he or she completes a specific number of problems) by themselves with you somewhere in the background or nearby and then check in with you.
- If a child is unable to focus themselves for any period of time, sit with your child initially while he or she gets started, then work toward being able to get up and have them keep working themselves.

THIRD AND FOURTH GRADE

- Give your child some say in where he or she does homework as well as what time is chosen to complete it. Putting some parameters in, such as before dinner or a set time, is fine.
- Prompt your child to explain the directions of each assignment to you (or caregiver at home) before beginning.
- Ask your child to make a plan of what order he or she will complete assignments in.
- Encourage them to estimate completion times and then write out the plan. You may need to write for your child initially, with the idea that over time he or she can write the list by him/herself.

FIFTH GRADE

- Continue to give your child autonomy in choosing where and when to complete homework within reason. A visual schedule of homework time each day based on afterschool activities may be useful.
- Have your child review directions for assignments by him/herself and discuss them with you ONLY if he or she feels that she needs assistance or clarification.
- Using a specific notebook, template, or electronic document (such as a notes app or Google Docs), your child should write down his or her own to-do list for the day and estimate completion times. If your child needs help with planning, he or she should be encouraged to ask you and discuss. Ultimately, your child should write down the plan him/herself.
- It is suggested that you spend time meeting with your child each day or every other day to review long-term assignments to ensure that those are being planned out properly and assist as needed.

SIXTH THROUGH EIGHTH GRADE

- Continuing to give your child autonomy in choosing where and when to complete homework is important. If needed, setting up concrete criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan may be helpful. And if the plan is not working, come up with a compromise on how to change it.
- Let your child do homework him/herself with as little input from you as needed UNTIL he or she demonstrates a need for greater oversight.
- If you have concerns about the quality of the child's work or its completion, set up a plan where you review the work with the child each evening. Work toward cutting back the frequency of this as your child or teen can demonstrate being able to do more him/herself.
- Scheduling times every day or every few days to review an online portal of grades can be useful in helping a child or teen catch missing assignments quickly as well as realize when there is an issue with their performance in a given course.



- If needed, seek professional assistance in the form of a tutor, executive functioning coach, or therapist for your child or teen to help with homework-related issues.

NINTH THROUGH ELEVENTH GRADE

- It is especially important at this stage that your teen has continued autonomy in when and where he or she completes their homework. The hope is that at this point, your teen has learned good study habits that he or she can implement themselves.
- If the rigor of the school or other circumstances are very different when transitioning to high school or to a new school year in high school, encourage your teen to review daily plans with you as well as review assignments for the first two to three weeks of school to ensure that he or she is on top of things.
- Give your teen an opportunity to keep on top of homework and plan out long-term assignments independently. If problems arise, try to have a conversation about it. If your teen views the issues as a problem, work collaboratively to solve them or seek professional assistance if needed.
- Have one to two check-ins per week where you sit down and have your teen lead a discussion where he or she walks you through grades in the portal. Have your teen make notes on what needs to be followed up on/completed. Check the status of these items at the next scheduled check-in.
- If your teen does not view the issues as a problem (such as missing homework assignments, continuing to not do well on

exams), explore what he or she would view as a problem with school. Work toward a compromise if possible, and set up concrete criteria that can be agreed upon to measure whether your teen is doing as well as he or she needs to. For example, if your teen feels that missing a few five-point homework assignments is not of concern, set up a plan where the amount of assignments missed each week are measured. Perhaps a goal the teen would agree with might be no more than 20 points lost in homework assignments in a two-week period.

TWELFTH GRADE

- Using this year as a trial run of college, with increasing independence for school and non-school related responsibilities, can be helpful in easing the transition to college or the workforce.
- Prior to the start of the school year, establish goals and criteria collaboratively to measure if your teen is on top of responsibilities. Set check-in dates at different points during the semester and year.
- If issues are occurring, especially if your teen views them to be

a problem, work collaboratively to address them or seek outside professional assistance if needed.

The most important takeaway from this article should be that no matter how old your child or teen is, focusing on increasing independence at each stage of development is crucial in order for them to attain complete independence as an adult. Giving children and teens autonomy to try out things themselves and measure their own success is helpful. If a child or teen does not have the room to try doing things themselves, they are far less likely to see the value in doing the work. Giving your teen autonomy to try doing it their way is essential to the process of navigating adolescence to transition into adulthood. If you've allowed them to try it their way and it is not working, many teens become far more willing to be open to suggestions on other ways of doing things. 📍

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