

Parent *pages*

**A Growing
Christian
makes the
Best Parent!**

Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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Is it Homework . . . or Parentwork?

When you find yourself with tape in your hair and plaster of paris under your fingernails, driving to the hardware store on a Sunday evening, hoping that you will find them open and selling red spray paint, you might have to ask yourself: “Who is this homework assignment for, anyway?” Parents have enough of their own homework: repeated practice in diaper changes, researching avenues of sibling conflict resolution, and intricate PowerPoint presentations on the “Cause-Effect Relationship Between the Completion of Chores and Your Allowance.” We really don’t need problems 1-14 on page 251 of the sixth grade math textbook added to our “to do” list.

Homework, in most circumstances, is a good thing. There is a correlation between homework and achievement test scores. Homework offers the opportunity for students to review and practice what they learned in school and also to investigate topics more thoroughly. Consistent homework gives students the chance to develop self-discipline and independent work skills. Homework also gives a student an opportunity to learn in a different way than what works best in the classroom. Projects that involve creativity, research and hands-on work are good examples. Trust me, we teachers don’t want red spray paint in our classrooms, that’s why we use homework assignments.

Homework’s proper place

Homework can become a problem. Too much homework can be a burden to a student. For students in the elementary grades, homework time should be limited to 20-40 minutes a day. Children need time to play and relax to prepare for the



next day of learning. Homework should not be a substitute for teaching. While homework affords extra practice, it should not be above the skill level of the child. When you help your child research a topic by monitoring Web usage, this is an example of good homework help. However, re-teaching long division is not what homework is for. Also, homework should be designed to help the child learn, not to prepare him for the spring time achievement test.

If you find your child is burdened by homework, does not understand the work, or is doing little more than busy work—these are good reasons to have a discussion with the teacher. Be ready to ask the reason behind the assignment and be ready to really listen to the explanation. This can be a positive experience for both you and your child’s teacher.

A parent’s role

Helping with homework can be a blessing in your relationship with your child. You have the opportunity to share your values for learning, model good study skills and teach your child important lessons about self-discipline. Besides, we can all use an occasional review on cell division or the Bill of Rights.

You can best help your child with homework by setting him or her up for success.

- Provide a place for homework, free of distractions and well stocked with supplies.
- Set a time each day for homework and work to prevent other activities from interfering with this time.
- Identify resources at home, at the library, or on the Web, that help your child complete his homework.
- Check on assignments before homework time and on completion afterward.
- If you correct homework, do not show your child what is wrong. Instead, indicate that something needs to be fixed and guide your child to find the problem.

It is easy to become over-involved in our children’s homework. We have busy lives and busy families and homework resists being rushed. It is too easy to give in and “assist” with the completion of an assignment. The best discipline for parents to practice is patience. When a baby out-grows the crib and moves to a bed, it takes patience to keep putting that child back into the bed. It is tempting to return the baby to the crib but then he or she

does not learn to stay in bed. Homework requires time and patience. If parents do too much to help and end up over-helping on the project, the child learns to find someone else to do the work instead of learning to apply himself or herself to a challenging project.

We don't like to see our children struggle with learning or work. It is very tempting to make our child's life "easier" by blaming something else or by helping too much. Bright children, especially, do not always realize that learning is work. They need to struggle with learning to value what they learn and to develop problem-solving skills. If your child asks for help, be sure he or she knows what help is needed. Otherwise encourage the child to return to the problem and get more information. Sometimes simply re-reading the directions can be enough to make things clear.

Don't take results personal

Be wary of the "My Child's Grade is My Parenting Grade" trap. I have seen many parents with one child on the honor roll and one child not. Did these folks become bad parents when the second child came along? Absolutely not—each child has his or her unique learning style and challenges. You can be a good parent even if your child is not a straight-A student. Children who fail because of a learning disability need the proper help, children who do not do perfect work because of interests or learning style may bloom in an area other than academics.

Children who fail because of a lack of study habits need to be held accountable for their own work and consequences. If your child is not doing well in school, talk with the teacher and work out a plan. Find out what your child needs to be more successful. Resist the temptation to create a false success by doing the work for the child, blaming the teacher, or demanding better grades be given for substandard work.

Admit it—some of the projects junior brings home look like fun. Who doesn't like to build the perfect log house, create

an intricate diorama of the White House, or build a model of the universe out of styrofoam balls? Projects like this can offer us the opportunity to relive our childhoods or at least dive into something fun. The amount of help we give children in projects depends on the intent of the assignment. Chances are, your child's teacher expects your child to do the bulk of the work.

Remember that your child's self-concept is wrapped up in this project. You may see 10 good ways to improve the log house, but your child will interpret this as his or her work was not good enough. You won't fool the teacher, either. Let your child do his or her best and lavish the project with praise. This is an important time for your child to learn and grow.

Scripture does not say much about homework, but God does speak to us about teaching our children. One of my

favorite passages is found in 2 Tim. 1:5, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." It is a simple reference but we know that nothing in God's word is without significance. Lois and Eunice modeled their faith and shared the word of God with Timothy.

Children who learn to study school work will have the self-discipline to study scripture. This is modeled by parents even as we pass on our faith.

Ezra devoted himself to the study of the law (Ezra 7:10). We want our children to develop a love for learning about God's word and about His world. Homework gives a parent a beautiful opportunity to nurture this love. It takes patience, persistence and practice. That is our "parent" work.



Questions for discussion

1. What do you remember about homework when you were a student? Did you dread it or see it as a challenge? How much help did your parents give?
2. What kind of "games" do your children play regarding homework? Do they attack it with relish or look for excuses?
3. How can you model self-discipline?
4. Do your children see you studying of God's Word? Do you study God's Word with them?
5. What is the significance of Eccl. 12:12?

Recommended reading/research:

- www.k12s.phast.umass.edu/~hharg/homeworkhelp.htm
www.faithandvalues.com
- "Scripture Talk: An Opportunity to Begin Faith Conversations" compiled by Lyle M. Griner, Youth and Family Institute of Augsburg College.

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