

Helping Hand

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Using Homework to Teach Life Skills

Many parents help their children with homework—and show their children the importance of education. However, many parents don't realize that homework is the perfect opportunity for teaching skills that are important to overall achievement and success.

The skills your child will need to succeed in today's world and the skills needed to complete homework on their own often are the same. Here are some ways to weave life-long lessons into everyday homework assignments:

Plan

Provide your child with a simple assignment book with space for due dates and a place to check off completed tasks. Teach him or her to manage time by helping schedule time for homework, chores and recreation.

Divide large tasks into smaller steps

Encourage your child to break apart long-range projects. Help make a chart or outline to schedule all the parts over several days.

Solve problems

Read directions together when your child is not sure where to start.

Get organized

Ask your child if all the tools needed to finish a project are available. Help your child think through the steps involved and what is required to complete each one. Encourage your child to keep the work area neat and organized.

Use resources

If your child doesn't know the answer to something, don't reveal it. Instead, help to find a resource where he or she can find the answer his or herself.

Persevere and complete a task

Encourage your child to try more than one approach to solving a problem before giving up.

Concentrate and question

Encourage your child to think about what he or she is doing and ask questions while working.



Juggling an Overpacked Family Schedule

Soccer, karate, family tennis lessons, dance class, mom's book club, dad's fishing trips with long-time buddies... It seems like a family of four can barely read their calendar at times because it's so jam-packed with activities.

These days, keeping up with the Joneses can mean an over-packed family schedule. While children need activities to develop socially and athletically, as parents, we sometimes need to know when to say when.



How do you know if you are over-scheduled? Here are some clues:

- your child isn't sleeping well or getting enough rest.
- your child lacks enthusiasm for the activity and says he or she doesn't want to go.
- your child's schoolwork or social life is suffering because of activities.
- you are always running late trying to rush from place to place.
- you rarely enjoy quiet time together at home as a family, because you are always out.

Facts About "Bath Salts"

"Bath salts" have been in recent news as a drug which is growing increasingly popular. Make no mistake however, this is not the typical substance added to bath water. On the contrary, the two substances have little in common aside from a shared name. Poison centers and emergency rooms have seen increasing issues with this drug, who's effects are similar to those of heroine, crack cocaine and LSD. Many states have placed a ban on this substance, but it is still widely available over the internet, on the street, and at gas stations and convenient stores in pill or powder form. Commonly labeled as bath salts, other packet labels include plant food or insect repellent.

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Common side effects include:

- hallucinations
- nausea/vomitting
- rashes
- anxiety/paranoia
- delusions
- dilated pupils
- depression
- increased heart rate or abnormal heart beats
- increased sweating
- teeth grinding
- suicide

Helping Potentially Violent Children

To reduce the risk of violence at school, staff, parents and students must be able to raise concerns when they observe these warning signs in a young person. There must then be a means to direct the troubled young person into the appropriate community or school-based service for treatment or education.

Here are some preventive measures parents, staff and other community members can take to help ensure safe schools:

- Discuss the school's discipline policy with kids. Show support for rules, and help children understand the reasons for them.
- Involve children in setting rules for appropriate behavior.
- Talk with young people about the violence they see on television, in video games and possibly in their neighborhoods. Help children understand the consequences of violence.
- Teach children how to solve problems. Praise young people when they come to a resolution.
- Help children find ways to show anger that do not involve verbally or physically hurting others.
- Help young people understand the value of accepting individual differences.
- Listen to young people when they share concerns about friends who exhibit troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional.
- Participate in a violence prevention group either at school or in the community. If no such group exists, form one.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in a young person. For example, frequent angry outbursts, excessive fighting and bullying, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school and in the neighborhood, lack of friends, and alcohol or other drug use can be signs of serious problems.
- Keep lines of communication open with young people, even when it's tough to do so. Parents, encourage your child to always tell you where and with whom he or she will be. Also, get to know your child's friends and his or her parents.
- Parents should be active in their child's school life by supporting and reviewing homework, talking with his or her teacher(s), and attending school functions such as parent/teacher conferences, class programs, open houses and PTA meetings.

The message is clear: If you notice the warning signs of potential violence in a young person, it's OK to be concerned — and it's even more appropriate to do something about those concerns. If you're concerned about a potentially violent child, talk with a school counselor, teacher or other school official.

Talking to Kids About Death

Whether prompted by the loss of a grandparent, the death of a pet, a news story about the fatal illness of a celebrity or simply a walk past a cemetery, worries about death arise early in life.

Here's how to talk to your children about it:

- It's okay to wait for a life event that raises questions of death for your kids. You don't have to rush to bring up the topic. Just resolve not to avoid it.
- When an event, experience or a question from your son or daughter brings death center stage, take that as the invitation to increase their comfort with it.
- Children fear isolation and abandonment. They commonly worry about whether a parent might die. Reassure them that after anyone dies, the people who loved that person help one another and make sure they're okay.
- Honor the power of memory. Tell children that as long as anyone who has lost a pet or a friend or a relative remembers the relationship, there must still be a powerful connection between them. Love doesn't die when the object of the love is gone.
- Share whatever elements of your faith have sustained you.

Parent - Child Contracts

Teaching children to be responsible individuals and family members is one of the primary tasks and challenges of parenting. Whether you're trying to teach a younger child to put away his or her toys or asking an older one to participate in household chores, the way you communicate your expectations will determine the results.

The parent-child contract is one way to encourage positive behavior and discourage bad habits. These contracts outline your expectations of your children's behavior and the consequences of their actions.

Verbal and visual contracts

You can demonstrate to younger children verbally and visually that you have limits and expectations for their behavior.

- Tell your child, for example, that you would like her to put his or her toys away every evening after dinner.
- Ask your child to suggest an appropriate reward for positive behavior and a consequence for negative behavior.
- Use a calendar with stickers posted on the days your child completes his or her responsibilities.
- Reward your child when his or her calendar has five stickers in a row.
- Draw simple illustrations to remind your child of his or her responsibilities and the rewards and consequences.
- Post the drawing on a bulletin board in your child's room.
- Be consistent about enforcing consequences and giving rewards.

Written contracts

With an older child, create a written contract that spells out the rules, rewards and punishments for certain behaviors.

- Outline your child's commitments—for example, to take out the garbage and recycling each week.
- Specify the times your child is to do the chores.
- Define the rewards and consequences.
- Write a handsomely lettered contract, signed by parents and child, and post it on the refrigerator.

