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topic facts

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I have homework.

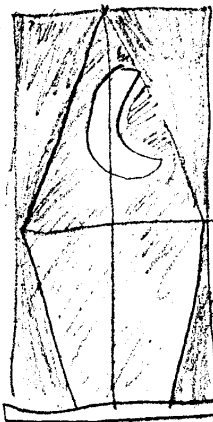
I don't remember what it is.

The other day I ran into a parent who was in a tizzy. School was about to start and she reminded me that her son was as disorganized as ever. Last year he remembered to bring his homework home, but he never got it back to school. She looked at me sorrowfully and said she couldn't face another year of frustration with her son. "I just want to love him and support him. I want him to experience success," she said.

Aggravation
with
homework
is a common
daily
occurrence
in homes
across the
country.

Many parents are at a loss for what to do when a child has trouble with homework. Inclusionary practices, which enable students to participate more fully in regular education, require teachers to accommodate a range of learners in their classrooms. It seems that students who receive accommodations in the classroom also need homework accommodations in order to meet assignment demands.

According to recent studies, students with mild disabilities experience considerable difficulty with homework. Homework plays an important role in academic success. Without attention to the need for adaptations in homework assignments, research suggests that we have little to be optimistic about regarding the potential success of these students.



Parents know that their children with learning difficulties experience greater problems with homework than their peers. Inability to pay attention (being easily distracted), lack of independence (won't do homework without someone working with him or her) and poor organizational skills (doesn't bring assignments home) interfere with a child's ability to do homework. Most importantly, frustration resulting from academic difficulty affects a child in all of the above areas. Without the hope of mastery in a basic skill area,





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such as reading or writing, the child's effort to participate in and perform homework assignments decrease.

Providing children with reinforcement and encouragement are the most critical factors in building their capacity to do homework. In addition, teachers must partner with parents so that a strong positive relationship can exist between family involvement and academic success.

A plan for homework

Here are some suggestions for parents to improve their child's homework experiences taken from "Practical Recommendations for Using Homework with Students with Learning Disabilities," *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, James R. Patton, November 1994.

Serve in a supportive role

The primary role of parents regarding homework should be to support and reinforce what is taught at school.

Go through training, if available

Parents can increase their effectiveness in assisting their child with homework if they are provided instruction and/or materials. When formal training is not available, some teachers invite parents to attend special sessions dealing with homework. This suggestion is particularly helpful when conducted early in the school year.

Create a home environment that is helpful to doing homework

First, parents need to set a specific time for doing homework in order to establish a routine that the child comes to expect. Second, a distraction-free setting for doing homework must be arranged. Third, parents should help their child obtain all necessary materials and equipment needed to complete homework assignments, although it is the student's responsibility to bring home any school material needed. (An assignment book and in class homework buddy will help support this effort.)

Encourage and reinforce student effort

To motivate your child, let him or her know how much their effort is appreciated and provide positive messages when homework is finished. Be careful not to over-monitor and make excessive corrections.

Maintain ongoing involvement

For parents to be effective contributors to the homework process, they need to be involved early on and stay involved over time. In many instances, without long-term interest in and interaction with their child's homework, problems may arise.

Communicate views regarding homework to school personnel

Parents should contact the school regarding their views on homework, be informed of their child's school-based performance and work together to resolve inconsistencies between home and school. Parents may choose to use simulation activities to sensitize teachers to the needs of their child with a disability.

The recommendations above can only be carried out when parents have the information they need to understand the classroom curriculum, teacher expectations and how the homework is designed to meet the needs of their individual child.

What parents find helpful

In interviews, parents said they appreciated using technology, such as assignments on e-mail or answering machines, to help them to understand an assignment. Knowing how and when to reach teachers was important to parents when questions and concerns arose. The use of an assignment book between home and school was effective in promoting communication between parents and schools if used continuously. In addition, parents found it helpful to include homework modifications and accommodations, supplementary supports and assistive technology, as needed, on their child's IEP.

Positive relationships between teachers and parents support the homework process. Affirming the child's willingness to do homework after a day of academic insecurity takes time and patience. Parents have to walk that delicate line of gentle encouragement and support while moving their child toward developing independent study skills. Remember, ensuring a positive homework experience includes valuing that children also need time to enjoy the non-academic aspects of life.