



Help your children to learn

GETTING THE BEST OUT OF HOMEWORK

For both primary and secondary parents

department for
education and skills

**Resources for
parents by parents**

Research shows that your interest and involvement in your child's learning and education is more important than anything else in helping your child fulfil their potential. As parents, you are the people who go with your child on their learning journey, from the day they are born to the time they become an adult.

You, as the parent, carer or guardian know your child best. These leaflets give ideas and suggestions for you to choose from – you will know which ones suit you, your child and the school. All of the ideas in the leaflet have been developed by parents and can be used with, or adapted for, both primary and secondary age children and young people.

There are many sorts of schools in England – the ideas and suggestions made in these leaflets do not necessarily reflect DfES policy or school policy and should be viewed simply as support for parents in helping their children to learn. Your school may not have seen this leaflet before and it may be helpful to tell them that you are going to use it. All schools have a home school agreement and by signing this agreement you will be acknowledging your partnership with the school to help educate your child. Working in partnership with the school will help your child become a successful learner and a rounded person.

Getting the best out of homework

Your home is a natural and comfortable learning environment where your child learns quite naturally and independently. By comparison, learning at school is formalised and led by a teacher. Sometimes, some children fail to learn so freely at school as they do at home. However, when home and school work together, your child will undoubtedly benefit.

In the pre-school years, you are obviously the first and most influential educator. The amount a child learns in these early years is quite enormous.



When your child starts attending school, teachers welcome information about your child's interests and strengths so that they can plan experiences and activities to capture his/her interests. In return teachers will share with you observations on your child and help you build on this at home with small fun tasks and challenges. These tasks reinforce and build upon the work undertaken in school and provide you with ideas that you might wish to develop at home or even whilst out shopping or on a bus or car journey.





At this early stage you will be very actively involved in your child's education and you will share in the successes and frustrations associated with the work. However, as your child progresses through the school system, so the nature and volume of homework steadily increases and also becomes more formal, challenging and demanding. Sometimes, and especially in the secondary phase of your child's education, it becomes a source of tension, frustration, and argument between you and your child. Nevertheless, despite such difficulties, it is important that you continue to take an active interest in your child's schooling and homework, in ways that work for you and your child. You might also find some of the suggestions in this paper helpful.

As a parent/carer you play a key role in helping your child to manage the school/homework/life balance and ensure that your child makes the most of his/her educational opportunities. Homework matters!

Why homework is important

- ❑ Completing homework regularly and conscientiously helps your child to do better. Completing homework can be equal to an additional year's schooling in the primary and secondary phase – the equivalent of two extra years of schooling.
- ❑ Your child practises and extends skills and knowledge learned in school.
- ❑ Your child makes use of learning resources in the home and the community that are not available within school.
- ❑ Your child takes ownership and responsibility for his/her learning. This in turn will help your child to become an independent learner.
- ❑ Your child also learns to organise and manage his/her time.
- ❑ It introduces your child to forthcoming class work.
- ❑ It helps teachers to monitor your child's progress and mastery of recent class work.
- ❑ It helps you to become involved in your child's education and learn about the things they do at school.

What is good homework practice?

- The school should have a clear homework policy statement, produced in consultation with the pupils, staff, parents/carers and governors. You should either be given a copy or have access to it.
- All members of the teaching staff work to this policy.
- The teaching staff and your child should see homework as an essential part of the school curriculum.
- The school should explain to pupils and parents/carers the importance, purpose and expectations of homework.
- It should be set and managed effectively. For example, the purpose and instructions for each homework task should be clear, and both pupils and parents should know how and where to get help. Pupils and parents/carers should also know how much time to be set aside for the task.





- Homework should be set according to pupil ability levels and their range of learning styles – pupils can be given different tasks according to their ability levels, or the same task but with different levels of support.
- Homework should be marked regularly, with feedback provided to both pupils and parents.
- It should be spread evenly over the course of a school week and the school year.
- The quality of completed homework will be monitored and reviewed by the school at regular intervals, in consultation with pupils and parents.
- Your support is seen as essential.
- Support, resources and advice should be available for pupils who find learning at home difficult, for example homework clubs, in school (lunchtime or after school) or in a local library or other community facility.



What information should I look for in a school homework policy?

- ❑ The purpose and nature of homework, along with how much your child should be expected to do as he/she moves up through the school.
- ❑ Information and guidance about what is expected of your child (and you) on a weekly basis.
- ❑ Guidance on homework for pupils with special needs, including those who are gifted and talented.
- ❑ Information on the role of parents/carers. Arrangements for two-way communication between home and school on homework should be made clear.
- ❑ Opportunities for supervised study in places other than the home.
- ❑ The school's arrangement for monitoring the Homework Policy.
- ❑ The name of the teacher with responsibility for ensuring that the demands of homework are manageable.

Frequently asked questions

What is my role in homework?

In the early primary years, you are encouraged to listen to your child read or get involved with some numeracy/maths tasks or simply discuss or make things together.

As your child grows older, more emphasis is placed upon encouraging him/her to learn independently. Your role remains important by ensuring that:

- your child manages and copes with the homework workload;
- homework is set, completed and marked;
- if need be you offer assistance and understanding.





I'm really busy and don't have time to help with homework. What can I do?

It is not essential that you sit down and give your child time each evening. You can display your interest in his/her schooling as you go about your work around the house, walk down the street together, do the shopping or travel around by bus, train or car.



Top Tip

Praise, encouragement and a display of interest in your child's homework can go a long way.

What parents think

I show the children that I value their schoolwork. I've got displays of their work and their certificates on the kitchen wall.



I can't help because education has changed so much since I was at school. I don't know how or what my child is taught?

It is sometimes difficult to keep abreast of the changes in education. It is therefore understandable that parents and carers often think that what's happening in school to be a bit of a mystery.



Top Tip

You can try and get a better understanding of what's happening in school in a number of ways:

- read letters sent home from school;
- read the school newsletters;
- visit the school whenever the opportunity arises. Look at the displays and examples of pupils' work;
- talk with teachers about your child's work whenever the opportunity arises;
- attend school open days/evenings;
- attend subject workshops arranged for parents/carers;
- should you be able to spare the time, respond to invitations to help out in school. This can be particularly rewarding and informative;



- some schools produce booklets for parents/carers on certain subjects or topics;
- some schools have a website which help you find out what your children are learning at school. If your child's school has one, visit it on a fairly regular basis;
- visit the DfES www.parentsonline.gov.uk;
- for information on ICT, check out the Parents Information Network website at www.pin.org.uk;
- look out for articles on educational matters in the local and national press;
- the DfES' 'Learning Journey' booklets could prove useful. For further details visit:
www.parentcentre.gov.uk/learnjourn/index

What parents think

If I don't know how to help, I go into school and ask the teacher.

If you can find out what's required from homework you can guide your child and look out for the necessary resources.

Going to college has helped me understand how children learn. It's also been a good influence on the children.

I'm not clever enough to help my child with homework. How can I be expected to help?

Children thrive on encouragement, praise, understanding and even some small rewards from time to time. It's not your ability that counts, it's a positive and encouraging attitude to your child's education that matters.

Top Tip

Ensuring that your child completes their homework, with some added encouragement and praise, will be valued by the school. You might also help by looking for information together, for example, going to a library together to collect information from either books, tapes, videos or CDs, researching information from newspapers, magazines and the Internet etc.

Alternatively, if you can't help, can someone else – an **older** brother or sister, a neighbour, friend or relative etc.?

What parents think

Ask them what they've learned and being prepared to learn from and with them works for me.

My daughter's now doing her A levels in subjects that I have no experience of, but I just try to offer her positive support and just tell her that she can do it. I'll also offer possible suggestions and guidance on where she might get the information she needs. Or, I'll try and read it myself and give my views on what's needed.



It's difficult for my child to study at home. It's noisy and there's not the space to get on with it. What can I do?

Schools try and help pupils around this situation by running homework clubs at lunchtime and/or after school. Computers and the school library's resources are also often available. Your neighbourhood library might also encourage pupils to make use of its facilities.

Top Tip

Inquire about the times and locations of these homework venues.

What parents think

Even though the house might be busy, is it possible to find a small space and some time to help your help your children with homework? Could they all do it together at the same time?

How do I know how much homework should be set for my child?

The school should inform you about how much homework your child should expect. This is set out in the school's homework policy and/or the Home School Agreement.

The Government has also issued guidelines for schools on this matter. Its recommendations are as follows:

For Primary School pupils

Years 1 and 2	1 hour/week	Reading, spellings, other literacy tasks and number work.
Years 3 and 4	1.5 hours/week	Literacy and numeracy as for Years 1 and 2 with occasional tasks in other subjects.
Years 5 and 6	30 minutes/day	Regular weekly programme of homework with continued emphasis on literacy and numeracy but also wide-ranging tasks across the curriculum.



For secondary school pupils

Years 7 and 8	45-90 minutes per day
Year 9	1-2 hours per day
Years 10 and 11	1.5-2.5 hours a day
Years 12 and 13	This will depend on the courses being followed. However, guidance on this matter should be available from the school.



Top Tip

For more information, contact your child's class teacher or form tutor.

My child doesn't want to tell me what homework's been set. What can I do about it?

This is not unusual. However, schools try and let you know what homework to expect in a number of different ways, such as:

- the school's homework policy outlines what will be expected of pupils;
- some schools publicise homework information on their website;
- many schools operate a homework diary which you can check and insert written messages for the teacher;
- school newsletters may let you know what to expect on a termly basis;
- a very small number of schools have a telephone help-line containing information on the homework set each day.





Top Tip

Discuss the matter with a teacher at a parents' evening. If there appears to be a specific problem, some arrangement with the school might be agreed.

What parents think

Just as long as you keep asking your child, without making a nuisance of yourself. Keep talking with them; show them that you are interested.

Keep checking the Homework Diary. If there appears to be a problem, contact the teacher.

I also used to keep an ear open to what other children were saying.

My child isn't getting much homework, it's sometimes set irregularly and then doesn't get marked often enough.

Depending on whether your child is in a primary or secondary school, talk with either the class teacher or Head of Year. There may be a good explanation.

Top Tip

If you are still not happy, talk to the teacher who is responsible for the school's homework policy. You could also discuss this matter with a parent governor.

What parents think

If he's not getting regular homework, the first thing I do is talk to my child to try and make sure of my facts. I've been caught out before, going into school to complain, when it turned out that my child was at fault.

If there is an issue with the school, stay positive rather than try to pin blame, and work together for the benefit of your child.



My child's talents are in sport, music and art. I regularly check his homework but unfortunately he does not show the same level of commitment to academic subjects.

This isn't unusual; children often put more effort into subjects they enjoy.



Top Tip

Try and encourage your child to put greater effort into the subjects they find less interesting by establishing a useful link to something they enjoy doing or the subjects that have more appeal.

What parents think

I try and get over to my child to enjoy the things that she is good at but also emphasise that she cannot ignore the things that she finds difficult and uninteresting. Acknowledge that we can't be good at everything. I tell her to use something inside her to unlock that topic or subject.

Sometimes he isn't given enough time to complete the homework or it all seems to come at once.

What can I do about it?

If you are concerned, talk with your child's teacher or form tutor. It might help to talk with your child about how he/she manages his/her time. Some schools give children a homework timetable or a diary. If it isn't being followed properly, you can bring this matter to the school's attention.

Top Tip

Discuss your concern with the class/form tutor or teacher with responsibility for the school's homework policy. You could also get information from the DfES 'parents' website www.parentcentre.gov.uk

What parents think

Talk with your child first to make sure that she has got herself organised with a routine that does not allow homework deadlines to slip.

Also, if the deadline is too tight, give your child the confidence to approach the teacher directly. When they are older, they certainly don't want me their Mum contacting the school.

Train them to take the adult approach and be responsible for their own homework.



All my child ever seems to do is finish off work done in class. Is this right?

Whilst from time to time it might be important to finish off some class-work at home, homework can take very many forms, as can be seen from the list below, which is not exhaustive!

- Reading;
- Writing;
- Numeracy work;
- Devising and/or playing a game;
- Practising a skill;
- Learning new information;
- Researching information;
- Discussing an issue with an older person;
- Designing or making something;
- Conducting an experiment;
- Listening to music;
- Watching and reviewing a television programme;
- Project work;
- Collecting and recording information/data, either within the home or in the community.



Top Tip

If the problem persists, speak with the teacher concerned or with the teacher with responsibility for the school's homework policy.





My child spends more time than is necessary on her homework. What can I do?

Pupils inevitably work at different speeds – some are often reluctant to do their homework, others try to do it too hastily, whilst some spend too much time on it.



Top Tip

Find out from the teacher how long your child should spend on the homework – many tell the pupils how long the activity should take. After discussing the task with your child, you could work out together some time deadlines for completing different aspects of the activity.

What parents think

It could also be a case of inspiring them to do better or more, or alternatively saying that they may need to reduce and simplify what they've produced.

I find it difficult to get my child to do his homework properly. What can I do?

There may be a number of reasons why your child has negative attitudes towards homework. Explore with your child the nature of the problem. These may include:

- is the work too difficult or too easy?
- has the task been explained clearly by the teacher?
- are the instructions clear?
- does your child have access to the necessary information and resources?
- is it difficult to work at home?
- is it simply boring?
- are there other things going on in your child's life that makes concentration on homework difficult?





Top Tip

Talk the matter through with your child first, and then if help is needed, talk with the class or form tutor.

What parents think

It's a family thing. If I get my work out and start doing it, they'll come up to me and ask me what I'm doing. They'll then get their homework out and we'll all work together.

I try and encourage their older brother and sister to get them to do it. We'll say, who's going to be teacher today?

Keep the dialogue with the year tutor going. He was invaluable in helping my daughter get through a rough patch. He got the other teachers to help and support my daughter. I don't think anyone should be afraid to keep in contact with the school. It can only be to the benefit of all parties.

My child is gifted and talented. How can I judge if the homework is sufficiently challenging?

The school should have individual learning goals for all pupils, that will help your child to progress according to his/her individual ability, rather than age. If you are unclear about what these are, talk with the class teacher, form tutor or the school's gifted and talented co-ordinator.



Top Tip

Listen to your children, they'll soon tell you if they are bored or not being challenged sufficiently.

What parents think

I also look out for any changes in behaviour or attitudes towards a subject that might indicate a problem.

My child finds it difficult to fit in homework with everything else that he does. What can I do?

This is quite natural. However, it is also important that your child completes his/her homework.



Top Tip

Together, explore how these interests might fit around the regular demands of homework. Try and establish a regular time and routine for completing homework. Agree, and keep to the decisions that you arrived at. You could also talk with your child's teacher.

What parents think

It's good that they have outside interests, but I make sure that they see homework as a priority. They will have to learn to prioritise as adults, so they might as well start young.



Useful weblinks

www.parentcentre.gov.uk

www.parentsonline.gov.uk

www.dfes.gov.uk/homework/

www.dfes.gov.uk/dadsandsons

www.pin.org.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/education/dynamo/parents/gamesideas

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/revisewise

www.homeworkhigh.com





Help your children to learn

Resources for parents

Reference HYCL



Help your children to learn

Making the most of time with your child

Reference HYCL/4



Help your children to learn

Making the most of parents' evenings

Reference HYCL/1



Help your children to learn

How is your child doing at school?

Reference HYCL/5



Help your children to learn

Formal meetings with teachers

Reference HYCL/2



Help your children to learn

A guide to supporting reading for parents of primary school children

Reference HYCL/7



Help your children to learn

Getting the most from school reports

Reference HYCL/3



Help your children to learn

A guide to supporting reading for parents of secondary school children

Reference HYCL/8

If you would like to share your experiences, or you have any queries or require further information, please visit our website www.parentcentre.gov.uk

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Further copies of this leaflet, and others in the 'Help your children to learn' series, can be obtained from Prolog: 0845 60 222 60 quoting reference HYCL/9 for this leaflet and the references shown above for others in this series.