

# Managing Homework

## Homework and Independence

Homework can be a source of real stress and tension between pupils and parents and establishing a healthy balance between support and independence can be tricky.

As boys get older, they can grow increasingly reluctant to discuss the details of their school life with parents, and homework may be completed in school or straight after school without parents knowing. Deadlines may also be set further into the future.

Ideally, homework reinforces the learning which has taken place in school, and offers the opportunity to develop wider skills (the academic skills of reading, analysing, researching, and critically evaluating sources of data, and personal characteristics such as grit and perseverance) away from the classroom.

However, arguably the most important function that homework performs for teachers is *feedback*: it shows the teacher what the pupil knows and can do, and the areas where they need more support. This is why homework completed exclusively by parents is unhelpful.

The *process* of completing homework is more important than the *outcome*; so how can parents best help?

- Provide a suitable **space** for work, ideally away from distractions such as TV, siblings, mobile phones and social media; but, for younger or easily-distracted pupils, working at the

kitchen table or similar might be helpful as they can ask questions and be gently monitored more easily. Some homework may require internet use, but discourage multi-screen and multi-windows activity

- Provide a **routine**: homework has to be fitted around meals, after-school activities, and family life. Each day may well be different, but if pupils can identify and develop effective routines of working they are more likely to complete homework on time and with increasing independence
- **Show an interest**: homework potentially connects the school, the pupil and parents on an ongoing basis; but...
- **Do not do the work for pupils**. As tempting as it can be to get your son to the 'right answer' at all costs, this disrupts the feedback role of homework and can also demotivate in the long-term, as the pupil struggles to work without very close support; and as they grow older, it is more likely they will be completing homework on topics beyond the scope of parental expertise!
- **Praise effort and diligence**, particularly in areas where your son finds things more difficult. But avoid shallow praise, and praising intelligence: research shows that telling pupils they are clever or talented sends the message that success is pre-determined and this leads to either complacency or demotivation
- Talk about the things you found hard

at school, and how you overcame obstacles. This helps to build a **growth mindset** which equips your son for a lifetime of learning and curiosity

- **Accept he is different** from you; parents are usually anxious that their children do not make the same mistakes as them, and frustrated that they do not listen to their advice
- **Let him learn by experience.** Pupils need practice in 'failing' in a safe environment. You might sense that he is leaving too much work for one night later in the week, but your son needs to experience this to understand the consequences of a work crisis; avoid 'I told you so' afterwards, but do ask what he could have done differently and how he can learn from the experience
- **Let him struggle** with individual tasks, and remember to help rather than do if and when you intervene
- **Communicate** with the teacher: if there are particular issues, do contact the teacher to seek clarification or guidance. Teachers want the best for their pupils and know they learn best when they are challenged at just the right level
- Resist **helicopter** or **snowplough parenting**: helicopter parents hover over their children; snowplough parents clear every obstacle in their path. Both approach can create 'learned helplessness' and a lack of independence
- **Encourage a balance** between academic and other interests and find time as a family to talk about non-school topics

**Further reading:**

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10578136/One-in-six-parents-do-all-the-homework.html>

This article looks at a research study that shows there is a fine line between helping your child understand what they are studying and completely taking over.

[http://www.theibsc.org/uploaded/IBSC/Action\\_Research/AR\\_2013-14/Norman\\_Report.pdf](http://www.theibsc.org/uploaded/IBSC/Action_Research/AR_2013-14/Norman_Report.pdf)

This is a research project completed at City of London School for Boys; there is a section on page 9 on the role of parents.

