

Eight Questions to Ask Your Child About Their Homework

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“Based on your last column, we now have a flexible schedule that starts with what we value, rather than starting with the givens of other’s schedules. Now we need help getting through the homework with as little fighting and as much learning as possible.”

We suggest asking your child these eight questions about their homework. They have evolved over the years and continue to develop as we do as professionals and parents. As always, take from them what seems to fit, for now, your family’s values about education, parental involvement, discipline, and other aspects of the homework experience. They can be used for each assignment and/or homework time as a whole.

1. “In your own words, what are the instructions asking you to do?” If assignment book notes are not clear, get more information. Today, many teachers have homework hotlines or websites with assignments. If not available, have your child call a classmate. Search the directions yourself for key words you can clarify. If still unclear, write that to the teacher and request an extra day to complete the assignment.
2. “What steps do you need to finish the assignment?” While listing the steps, write approximate times for each step.
3. “What do you need help in understanding?” For example, does your child need a reminder of how to do double digit division before starting the math page? Ask if your child has already done similar problems that can be a guide in completing these current ones. Even if a child needs some pre-practice, let him/her independently do the actual assignment.
4. “What materials and work space do you need?” Look for sales and buy extra graph paper, colored pencils, and poster board.
5. “What do you need from me for example, reminders, time keeping, encouragement, water, a snack, keeping your sister/brother out, etc.?”
6. “What do you need from yourself for example, focus, determination, motivation, creativity, memory, etc.?”

7. The final questions are asked after the homework. “What worked and didn’t work such as understanding your assignment notes, doing the steps, and getting what you needed from materials, your work space, me, and yourself?”

8. “So, what will you do next time based on what was and wasn’t useful this time?”

Use any or all of these questions, modifying wording to make them your own. Based on parent feedback for example, each are now worded so that a simple “yes” or “no” is less probable. If needed, take advantage of study skills training offered at some schools and learning centers. Total Learning Center for example has a very effective “Homework Coaching” program. Whether alone or with help, one thing for sure- once you have finally crafted the perfect questions, you’ll find it’s time to modify them again based on the ever-changing demands and joys of preparing today for success tomorrow.