

What Parents Should Know—and Do—About Homework

By the National Middle School Association

While it sounds like a no-brainer, knowing the purpose of homework is critical in providing the help your son or daughter needs to get the most out of it. First of all, you need to find out the purpose of homework from the teacher who assigns it. Is homework used to finish work begun at school, to provide more practice with new skills, or to complete large-scale projects? Next, sort out the reasons you want your young adolescent to complete homework. Is it to help develop discipline and a productive work ethic? Finally, frequently speak with your children about the importance of homework, whatever the reasons, so they understand why they are doing it. Other tips:

- **Details do count**—and so does consistency. Work with your young adolescent to set a regular time, place, and duration for homework to be done—not in front of the television and not during commercial breaks. When is the best time for homework to be completed—right after school, before supper, or after supper? Is listening to music allowed? Setting a quiet and undisturbed place to do homework is important.
- **Who's responsible?** The young adolescent whose homework is in question must be responsible—always. If your child is not forthcoming about assignments, you must get the information from the teachers. Don't do the homework for your young adolescents, but do have them explain to you what they are doing and what they have learned from the homework.
- **Reading is always an appropriate homework assignment.** If your son or daughter has no homework, finishes early, or simply doesn't have anything else to do, he or she should be reading. Family members can be excellent role models by making sure that the entire household reads regularly. Keep the television off most of the evening, turning it on only for specific shows, if that.

Five Ways to Be Supportive in the New School Year

- Get to know the school your young adolescent attends. What is its philosophy and mission? Is it more traditional or more progressive? How is it organized? Who are the people who can help you and your child?
- Personally introduce yourself to your son or daughter's teachers. Many middle-level schools use teaching teams. How does the teaching team work together? When is the best time to contact the teachers with questions?
- Determine how you can be an active part of the school and what you can do to contribute. Every parent has some skill, talent, or knowledge to share with students or teachers.
- Remember that the best support you can provide your young adolescent is to be there. Be visible in the school so your child knows that you care, and the school knows, too.
- Help the school be the best it can be. Push for experiences and practices that truly make a difference for all children in the school—engaging and interesting work, standards that hold students accountable on a realistic yet challenging level, and opportunities for students to contribute to their school and community.

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