

Visit Schwab Learning's Online Resources



SchwabLearning.org is a parent's guide to helping kids with learning difficulties. We'll help you understand how to:

- **Identify** your child's problem by working with teachers, doctors, and other professionals.
- **Manage** your child's challenges at school and home by collaborating with teachers to obtain educational and behavioral support, and by using effective parenting strategies.
- **Connect** with other parents who know what you are going through. You'll find support and inspiration in their personal stories and on our Parent-to-Parent message board.
- Locate **resources** including Schwab Learning publications, plus additional books and websites.

SchwabLearning.org is free and provides reliable information at your fingertips, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



SparkTop.org is a one-of-a-kind website created expressly for kids ages 8-12 with learning difficulties, including learning disabilities (LD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). Through games, activities and creativity tools, kids at SparkTop can:

- Find **information** about how they learn, and get tips on how to succeed in school and life
- Showcase their **creativity** and be recognized for their strengths
- Safely **connect** with other kids who know what they are going through

SparkTop is free, carries no advertising, and is fully compliant with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).

Teacher's Resource Center (TRC) on SparkTop
www.SparkTop.org/teacher

The TRC provides teachers with:

- **Free** and **fun** classroom activities
- **Innovative** ways to use SparkTop in the classroom
- **Valuable articles** and **resources** on LD and AD/HD



25 TOP TIPS for Handling Homework

Practical ideas parents can use to help their children with the daily demands of homework



A nonprofit program of the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation

25 Top Tips for Handling Homework

is designed to give parents useful strategies for helping their children manage their homework—from elementary through high school.

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Schwab Learning is dedicated to helping kids with learning difficulties be successful in school and life. We develop and deliver resources that provide parents of kids with learning difficulties, and kids themselves, practical information, emotional support, and trustworthy guidance.

We offer two free websites:

- SchwabLearning.org—designed specifically for parents
- SparkTop.org™—created expressly for kids ages 8-12 with learning difficulties

Schwab Learning's Outreach & Community Services team further supports the needs of kids and families through educational workshops, seminars, presentations, exhibits, and special projects.

Download additional free copies of this booklet at www.SchwabLearning.org/homework

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SET THE STAGE • ORGANIZE & OPTIMIZE

1 GET ORGANIZED



Keep homework supplies close at hand.

“Mom! Where’s the stapler?” To avoid digging through drawers, create a cache of homework supplies and keep it close to where your child works. Dedicate a desk drawer, box, or bin with often-used items. The supply list provided by the teacher is a great resource. Or use the list to the right as a starting point.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

Supplies

- Pens, pencils, erasers, pencil sharpener
- Paper (lined and blank)
- Glue stick
- Highlighter pens
- Stapler, paper clips, tape
- Sticky notes
- Dictionary and thesaurus
- Calculator
- Scissors, hole punch
- Electronic spell checker

2 OPTIMIZE THE ENVIRONMENT

Be flexible about your child’s study place.

Not every child works best sitting at a desk in a silent room. Ask your child how he likes to study—lying on the floor, sitting on his bed with a lap desk, or at the kitchen table amidst the bustle of dinner preparations. Some kids like background noise; others prefer quiet. While television is almost always a distraction, music is welcome white noise to many kids. Your child’s favorite study environment might change as he grows and may vary depending upon the type of work. The key is to be flexible while ensuring that homework is completed.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.



SET THE STAGE • ORGANIZE & OPTIMIZE



3 CLEAR AWAY CLUTTER

Set aside everything not related to the task at hand.

When your child comes home in a panic because of homework assignments in multiple subjects, ease her overwhelmed feeling by helping her focus on one thing at a time. Review everything that needs to be done and choose one assignment to start with. Gather and organize the materials needed to complete the chosen task and set everything else aside until it's time to tackle the next assignment. GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.



Assignment Sheet Information

- *Date assigned*
- *Subject (math, book report)*
- *Assignment (book title, pages to read, problems to solve, etc.)*
- *Project components (answer review questions, write a paragraph on what you find most interesting)*
- *Date due*
- *Date completed*

4 USE A PLANNER

Use a homework planner to record assignments.

Help ensure that all your child's homework arrives home each day by teaching him to record each assignment as it's given. A daily planner (print or electronic) or assignment sheet provides a central place to record assignments. He can review the sheet at the end of each day and make sure the needed materials are in his book bag. If necessary, his teacher can review and initial the assignment sheet to ensure the assignment was recorded correctly. GRADES 4 THROUGH 12.

5 BOOKMARK IT

Save links to useful reference sites on the Internet.

The Internet is full of helpful "homework help" websites. These sites, divided by subject, can help your child with tricky assignments and research projects. Another benefit: in order to find the right information, your child must first understand what she needs to know, and that's the first step toward solving a problem. Save the addresses of a few of these sites in the "Favorites" file of your web browser. GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.



6 BUILD A LIBRARY

A home reference library is an invaluable homework aid.

A small library of reference materials, in either print or electronic form, can be a handy resource for your child. GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.



Homework Help Resources

- *BJ Pinchbeck's Homework Helper—<http://school.discovery.com/student>*
- *HomeworkSpot—<http://www.homeworkspot.com/>*
- *Check your local library's website for their recommendations*

Home Library Collection

- *Age-appropriate children's dictionary and standard dictionary*
- *Encyclopedia: There are excellent versions in print and on CD-ROM. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian for their recommendation*
- *Thesaurus: Print versions are generally more comprehensive than the thesaurus built into word processing programs*
- *Atlas: Make sure it is up-to-date*
- *Almanac: This reference should also be kept current*
- *Foreign language dictionary: For kids studying languages*

GET IT DONE • STAY ON TASK



Things to Consider When Setting the Schedule

- *Your child's age*
- *The likely amount of homework*
- *Your child's extra-curricular activities (sports, music lessons)*
- *When he'll work best:*
 - *Right after school?*
 - *After some play time?*
 - *After dinner?*

Play-to-Homework Transition Tasks

- *Feed a pet*
- *Help fold laundry*
- *Set the dinner table*
- *Sweep the floor*

7 STICK TO A SCHEDULE

Schedule time for homework every day—and stick to it.

When school starts each fall, schedule homework into your family's daily routine. With your child, agree on a specific time period for doing homework, including some weekend time. Even when there are no assignments to complete, adhere to the schedule by using homework time for review or reading.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 8.



8 EASE INTO IT

Avoid an abrupt transition from playtime to homework.

It can be hard for kids to switch from playing or other pleasurable activities to concentrating on homework. Make the transition easier by giving your child a small task before she settles down to work. Assigning a job she usually does without a fuss creates a more gradual shift from play to homework and puts your child in a "work" frame of mind.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 8.

9 GET OFF TO A GOOD START

Help your child get started with homework, then back off.

If your child is unsure about an assignment, set him on the right track by sitting together and reviewing the instructions. Check his understanding by having him explain how he will proceed, then stay close by while he answers the first few questions. With his confidence built, you can back off and let him complete the rest of the assignment on his own.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 8.



10 KEEP THINGS IN ORDER

Tackle assignments in the best sequence for your child.

When your child has several homework assignments, some she can breeze through and others that take more effort, which should she tackle first? That depends on your child and on the particular mix of assignments. Starting with easier work and moving toward the more challenging builds your child's confidence. On the other hand, getting the tough stuff done first lets her breathe a sigh of relief. Try both approaches to see which works best. But don't be afraid to mix it up—if she's frustrated with a tricky assignment, suggest she set it aside in favor of something easier. She'll return to the challenging assignment refreshed and with renewed determination.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 8.





11 TAKE TIME OUT

Set a timer to pace homework sessions.

If your child has difficulty focusing on homework long enough to complete it in one sitting, use a kitchen timer to set agreed-upon study and break times. Work together to estimate the total work time needed, and then break the total into smaller chunks. Thirty minutes of math homework might be broken into two 15-minute work periods with a five-minute stretching or snack break. Adjust the work and break intervals to suit your child's age, temperament, and the intensity of the homework.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 8.



Sample Goals for a Research Paper Due in Five Weeks

- *Week 1: Library and Internet research*
- *Week 2: Outline*
- *Week 3: Rough draft*
- *Week 4: Editing and final draft*
- *Week 5: Proofreading and polishing*

12 PLAN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Set intermediate goals for long-term projects.

Make long-term projects manageable by helping your child break the project into smaller goals. Set a target for when each goal will be met, leading to completion of the entire project. This process helps your child focus on a smaller aspect of the assignment, keeps him motivated, and teaches him planning skills.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

13 ASK LEADING QUESTIONS

When your child hits a roadblock, ask questions that guide her to the answer.

Rather than giving your child the answer when she's stuck, ask questions to get her thinking about how to solve the problem on her own. If she's stumped by a math problem, look at the last problem she successfully solved. Ask, "What was the first step you took to solve this one?" Lead her through the steps until the tricky one becomes clear. Your questions will prompt her to take small steps toward breaking a roadblock.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.



BUILD GOOD HABITS • BE A ROLE MODEL



Ideas for Tasks to Do While Your Child Works

- *Read the newspaper*
- *Pay bills*
- *Balance the checkbook*
- *Sort mail*
- *Plan menus*
- *Make shopping lists*

14 BE A ROLE MODEL

Use your child's homework time to do your own work.

When your child sits down to tackle homework, join him by taking care of your own "homework" at the same time. Choose chores that are interruptible if your child needs your help and set a good example by not working while watching television.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 8.

15 STAY POSITIVE

Let your own upbeat attitude toward learning rub off on your child.

If your child senses that you dread homework sessions, she'll dread them too. A positive attitude, particularly when your child is facing a tough assignment, goes a long way toward taking the tedium out of the daily work. Keep in mind, though, that teachers are sometimes unreasonable in the timing or amount of homework they assign. Help your child resolve such challenges by asking the school/teacher what their homework policy is.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.



16 LET GO OF RESPONSIBILITY

Avoid rescuing your child from homework emergencies.

All kids, at some point, forget their homework or put it off until it becomes a crisis. When that happens, avoid stepping in to fix things. Instead, guide your child through the steps needed to salvage the situation. If he's forgotten his assignments, for example, sit with him while he checks the school's homework web page or calls a classmate. If an assignment cannot be completed on time, instead of writing a note to the teacher yourself, have your child write it, explaining why the work is late and requesting an extension. Both of you should sign the note. Letting your child take responsibility for his mistakes gives him valuable problem-solving experience.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

17 BE AN ADVISOR

Be available for help as a consultant.

Your child's homework is hers to do, not yours. Let her know that you are willing to help but limit yourself to a consultant role. Avoid evaluating your child's work unless she specifically requests your opinion. It's OK to point out mistakes, but let your child decide whether to correct them. Seeing the errors will help the teacher understand your child's learning process.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

Your Role as Homework Consultant

- *Help understand the assignment*
- *Work together on a sample problem*
- *Be a brainstorming partner*
- *Discuss theories and ideas*
- *Check completed work*
- *Help with proofreading*



BUILD GOOD HABITS • BE A ROLE MODEL



18 CALL IN ASSISTANCE

Recognize when outside help is required.



There may be times when you are not the best person to help your child with homework. If working together leads to frustration, look for outside help. This need not mean costly tutors or joining a homework center. You could, for example, make a trade with a classmate's parent: you agree to work with both kids on English assignments if she takes on science. Or recruit an older sibling or your spouse. It's better to maintain your relationship as a loving parent than get into a cycle of anger and aggravation over homework. GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

19 KNOW WHEN TO CALL A HALT

Sometimes you have to say “enough is enough.”

Everyone has his limit, and there may be occasions when your child becomes too tired or frustrated to continue on an assignment. That's the time to stop. If possible, your child can return to the assignment later on. When the work is due the next day, write a note to the teacher explaining that he completed as much as he could. Know when to be your child's ally and avoid letting homework push him to the brink of a meltdown. GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

20 KEEP A HOMEWORK HISTORY

File completed assignments for quick reference.

Completed homework assignments are a valuable resource. Your child can refer to them to check how he solved problems in the past, see progress made in each subject, and detect patterns of errors. To set up a homework history, create a color-coded file folder for each subject. File completed assignments in order as his teacher returns them. GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

21 MAKE THE GRADE

Take the time to review your child's graded assignments.

Make a point of reviewing your child's homework assignments after they have been graded and returned by the teacher. This review is an opportunity to praise work done well and progress made. You will also see trouble spots and areas where extra practice is needed. When you treat homework as an important part of school and learning, your child will value its importance too. GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.





22 REWARD PROGRESS

Give your child small rewards for reaching goals.

Providing an occasional reward for reaching homework goals can be a great motivator. When your child faces a particularly difficult assignment, offering an incentive (such as letting her choose the next movie rental) could be just what she needs to get through it. Also consider incentives for longer-term goals like completion of a complicated project. Rewarding her for hard work is similar to promising yourself, “When I finish painting the back door, I’m going to sit down and read for a while.”

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

23 TURN YOUR CHILD INTO A TEACHER

Encouraging your child to teach you gives him confidence.

It’s true that teaching others reveals how much you really know. Turn the tables on your child and have him show you how to complete his assignments. Ask a lot of “how,” “why,” “when,” and “who” questions. Giving explanations helps your child think through concepts and step-by-step processes and discloses areas where more work is needed. You can then work together to fill in the gaps in his knowledge.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.



24 KEEP IT INTERESTING

Tie homework to your child’s interests whenever possible.

Kids are often able to choose their own topic for homework assignments or projects. Use those opportunities to relate the work to something your child is passionate about. For example, if an English assignment requires that your child write five compound sentences, suggest that she write about her favorite hobby, a recent family trip, or her pet. The work goes faster and is more fun when your child is truly engaged in the subject.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 12.

25 CHANGE THE SCENERY

Try tackling homework in an unusual location.

Make homework time a special occasion by moving the study area to an offbeat place. Set up homework camp in a tent in the backyard or living room. Spread out under a tree or in a tree house. Try the top bunk or even a walk-in closet. Just be sure to take along all the usual homework supplies so everything your child needs is close at hand.

GRADES 1 THROUGH 5.

