

Communicating about Homework Suggestions for Parents

by Dahlia Miller

Very few people really enjoy homework. It can be a source of challenge for both students and parents, to put it mildly.

This article explores some ideas about communicating around homework as well as offering some tips for approaching homework. This is a huge topic, though, and we will only be able to skim the surface. There are plenty of good resources available for more information – some are listed in the side bar.

Remember that as children learn and grow, they understand much more than they are capable of doing at first. The same holds true with homework, study skills and communication. A healthy dose of patience will go a long way in helping a parent to stand by while their child makes study skills “mistakes”.

Make observations about behavior (without guessing at the child’s motives), get in touch with your own needs (for respect, acceptance, safety, trust, peace, love, etc.) and make requests based on those needs.

Identify or acknowledge your child’s feelings as they come up. This gives students a chance to express their emotions and move through them to find solutions. Although it may seem fairly passive, just describing is much more effective than denying, criticizing, offering advice, explaining away or ignoring feelings.

Describe rather than praise or blame. Description doesn’t get involved with whether something is “good” or “bad” it just points out what has and/or hasn’t been done. For example, saying, “Your binder is organized and your backpack is ready to go for tomorrow,” shows your child that you see and recognize his efforts. He can draw his own conclusions about how organized a person he is. Similarly, “You’ve done five math questions and have six more to go,”

could be easier on the ears than, “You’ve still got six more questions to do.”

Make requests. How do you feel when someone demands something of you? Almost all people resist demands. A request, however, is a different story. You might try, “Would you be willing to...?”

For contentious issues, describe the situation as you see it and listen to your child’s feelings. Then describe your feelings and request a shared brainstorm to come up with some possible solutions. For example, “The teacher called to say that you haven’t handed any homework in for the last week. I guess it’s hard to get into homework after a long day of school.” Listen first, and then describe your needs: “My concern is that you’ll start to fall behind.” Brainstorm, writing down all ideas without discrimination to start (so your child sees that you take her suggestions seriously). Together evaluate which proposals could work and how you’ll put at least one into action.

- Model the behavior you’d like to see:
- ▶ When your child is speaking, listen.
 - ▶ Don’t be bossy, sullen or whiny.
 - ▶ Stretch yourself and learn more. Let your kids see you struggle and persevere in learning a new skill or topic.
 - ▶ Be curious – about your kids, about the world, about your kids’ understanding of the world.
 - ▶ Demonstrate self-confidence – be polite yet firm.
 - ▶ Ask your child to check your spelling and math.
 - ▶ Be responsible with your schedule, your eating habits, and your work/family life balance.

Set up a good study environment – a quiet place with proper lighting and enough supplies.

News & Announcements

Happy Birthday to Us!

Smart Tutor Referrals is celebrating 7 years of supporting families in education. *Thank you for continuing to support this local, values-based business.*

Communication Resources for Parents

Faber, Adele and Mazlish, Elaine. How to Talk So Kids Can Learn. New York: Fireside, 1996.

Rosenberg, Marshall B. Teaching Children Compassionately: How Students and Teachers Can Succeed with Mutual Understanding. California: PuddleDancer Press, 2003.

----- Life-Enriching Education. California: PuddleDancer Press, 2003.

Levine, Mel. The Myth of Laziness. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

Online Bookstore Launch

STR is launching an online retail store for educational books and resources to support students, parents and teachers. We’ll keep you posted about the launch date.

STR in the Community

STR continues to offer talks and workshops for peer tutors, learning resource teachers, teachers and students.

If you are interested in hosting a talk by Smart Tutor Referrals, please contact us for more information.

30 - 45 minute talks for peer tutors are offered free of charge as a community service.

About Us

We provide **1-on-1, in-home tutorial support** throughout Victoria, Saanich and Sooke.

STR was established in Victoria, BC in 2002 and has built a solid reputation for creativity and professionalism.

With over 50 tutors, we are able to find the best match for each student. Our tutors are certified teachers and professionals. They are carefully screened and chosen specially to match the needs and learning styles of each student.

Our goal is to enhance students' skills and to cultivate learning confidence through support that is truly individualized: matched specifically to each student's needs, recognizing each student's unique talents and abilities.

We support families in education.

For more information and resources, visit us on-line at:

www.SmartTutorReferrals.com

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Set a consistent routine, allowing some flexibility, but change the routine sometimes.

Set a time limit for TV and computer. (Some experts suggest a limit of 2 nights per week for TV.)

Set a time limit for homework. 30-60 minutes per night is adequate for students up to grade 9 or 10; 60-90 minutes for grades 10-12.

Reward study time rather than grades. Homework requires effort and discipline. Habits of self-discipline are created over time. This is one of the main reasons why homework is assigned in the first place.

Discuss what kind of support your child would like for homework. Do they want you to remind them that it's homework time or to check in to be sure that their backpack is packed in the morning? Do they want a reminder of homework that needs to be handed in? Do they want you to help break bigger projects into more manageable steps? If your child responds to checklists for backpacks or homework tracking, create some.

Check your child's agenda daily or at least every second day. If it seems important to you, they'll begin to see it as important to them too. Check that they have completed their homework. Or, have your teen show you their completed work daily.

If there is no homework, ask your child to teach you something that he learned in class that day.

Help prioritizing if your child seems stumped about where to start with homework or is avoiding getting started. Help them to evaluate where to start: What is due first? How long will each assignment take? What is hardest? What could be broken down into steps? Sometimes starting with the hardest thing first is nice as it gets it over with; sometimes starting with something easy is good as it builds confidence and momentum.

Suggest interesting alternatives for study: tape recorder, video, power point, experiments... Show an interest in the subject matter and in their studies in general.

Ask yourself, "What kind of teacher am I? How can I do better?" Listen to your tone of voice when you are talking about homework – are you patronizing or lecturing?

Show love and respect, acknowledging efforts even if they don't "measure up".

Notice your child's reactions to your help. If your child is interested in having your assistance, provide some if necessary, but if your child seems to react negatively, step back.

Stop while it's still fun if you're working together (for spelling, reading, multiplication tables, etc.). If it's not fun, go to the library and find some books about learning games – there are books in the parent-educator section of the library.

Know your child's learning style – it may be different from your own. Keep this in mind if you are teaching your child or asking your child to teach you something she has learned.

Ask questions like, "Is there another way to do it?" "What else can you think of?" "This may be one way to do it." Be patient – wait for answers.

Have trust and confidence in your child's ability to learn independently. Don't hover as they work.

Ask simple, direct questions to open up a dialogue about school. "Tell me one good thing and one bad thing about school today." can bring a much more detailed answer than the very general, "How was your day?"

Observe how you describe your child's abilities. Let them hear you say good things about them.

Write an encouraging note for your child and put it in his lunch, on the fridge or in chalk on the sidewalk.