

Defeating the Homework Blues

Is it a struggle and a challenge getting your kids to complete their daily homework? Do you get frustrated and dread homework time? If you answered yes to either of these questions, this article is for you. This article contains insightful solutions to your daily homework blues. Having worked as a mental health therapist for over 20 years, I noticed that many families share specific common unhealthy beliefs and values centered on the issue of homework. This article identifies these unhealthy beliefs and values that impede the homework process.

1st Unhealthy Belief: “I need to assist my child with homework because he or she does not understand the homework.” Many parents feel that their children require assistance when completing homework. School teachers give children homework to practice specific skills taught that day in school. Your child, unless he or she was inattentive in class, should have a general idea of how to complete his or her homework. Sometimes, kids pretend that they do not know how to complete homework in hopes that their parent would do it for them. A parent who routinely helps their child complete homework because of class inattentiveness is reinforcing the inattentiveness. Why would your child choose to pay attention in class if he or she knows that you are going to help them with their homework anyway? Failing to pay attention in class is not an academic issue. It is a behavioral issue that requires a behavioral intervention. Your child needs to take responsibility for failing to pay attention in class. One way to do this is to have your child attend school the next day with his or her homework uncompleted. It is not your fault that your child failed to complete his or her homework. I have worked with several parents who blamed themselves for and assumed responsibility of their child’s homework that they began experiencing signs of burnout. Give that responsibility over to your child. Your child will ultimately experience school consequences for his or her failure to complete homework. By giving your child the ownership and responsibility of his or her homework promotes accountability, organization, and self-confidence. Parents should never fear having their children experience negative consequences. Consequences are learning experiences that teach children right from wrong. If parents always protect their children from experiencing consequences, their children may never learn right from wrong. Instead, they will always expect their parents to pick up the pieces when they make a mistake. Think of it this way – when you do not know how to complete a specific task at your place of employment, what do you do? Do you ask your significant other or your employer how to complete the task? Obviously, you would get your instruction from your employer. Therefore, your child needs to learn from his or her school teacher. I am not suggesting that you shouldn’t help your child every once in awhile. However, if assisting your child with homework becomes routine, there is a problem. An easy indicator as to whether your child truly requires assistance with homework is to ask his or her school teacher how much assistance your child requires with school work. If your child’s school teacher says that your child works independently and requires minimal assistance, then there is a strong possibility that your child is manipulating by making you believe that he or she requires significant assistance. If your child’s school teacher reports that your child frequently day dreams, fails to pay attention, and requires significant assistance when completing school work, you should probably consult with your child’s physician to rule out medical and/or psychological factors that might be contributing to these behaviors.

2nd Unhealthy Belief: “My child will only complete his or her homework in my presence.” This is a common misconception that parents share. The problem with having your child complete homework in your presence is that there are usually too many distractions or stimulation making it difficult for him or her to focus and concentrate on homework. Asking for your assist is also too convenient. Dinner preparation, people walking through the room, conversations, and telephone calls are all common distractions to a child who is attempting to complete homework. This is especially counterproductive for a child who has been diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). The best place for a child to complete homework is in his or her bedroom or some other secluded room of the home. Completing homework in a secluded room would limit distractions/stimulation and make it less convenient to ask you for assistance.

3rd Unhealthy Belief: “Toys and games in my child’s bedroom prevent him or her from completing homework.” Think in terms of your child completing homework in his or her bedroom as a form of grounding. Your child is not really grounded. However, your child should not be allowed to exit his or her bedroom, for the exception of bathroom breaks, until the homework is completed and checked by you. Since your child will receive limited attention from you, completing homework in the bedroom will only act as an incentive for your child to complete homework timely. This technique will also help your child learn to focus, become more organized and structured, and become accountable for his or her actions. If by chance your child fails to complete his or her homework by their bedtime, your child should attend school the following day with his or her homework uncompleted. As mentioned earlier, your child will experience consequences at school for his or her failure to complete homework.

4th Unhealthy Belief: “My child loves being in his or her bedroom and will never submit to completing homework in there.” Even though plenty of parents tried to convince me that their children would rather spend days and nights in their bedroom rather than playing outside or in the living room, this is manipulation at its best. The child who knows that he or she is grounded to their bedroom until submitting to a specific behavior will likely make it their duty to convince their parent that they really enjoy the consequence. By getting parents to believe this may subsequently entice the parent to choose a different consequence or eliminate the consequence altogether. In reality, your child would rather play outside or in public areas of your home instead spending days and nights in his or her bedroom. If your child engages in activities in his or her bedroom such as watching television or playing video games instead of completing homework, you should remove these activities from your child’s bedroom because he or her is compromising your parental authority. These items can be restored once your child follows your rules.

5th Unhealthy Belief: “I believe that my child should serve a mandatory daily study

hour regardless of his or her academic ability.” Typically, a mandatory daily study hour consists of children completing homework and engaging in other academic activities such as reading to complete the hour. I would only recommend a child serve a daily study hour if his or her report card grades fall below a specific grade expectation. For instance, if you and your child previously agreed that a daily study hour would be enforced if his or her grades fall below a C in any given subject, your child should be required to serve a daily study hour for the next school term until his or her grades improve to a C or better. If your child maintains grades consistent with your expectations as noted on his or her report card, he or she should only complete their daily homework and should not be required to serve a daily study hour. Play time is very important to a child. Therefore, it is necessary for children to have equal play and study time. A child should only have a mandatory study hour as a consequence to poor school grades as noted on his or her report card. 6th Unhealthy Belief: “I believe that my child should begin completing homework after dinner each day.” The best time for children to complete homework is right after they get home from school. Once at home, children should have a snack consisting of an edible and a beverage before completing homework. The snack time should be limited from 15 minutes to a half an hour. It is important for children to have a snack, especially a beverage, before completing their homework because this helps re-energize their brain muscles. Since there is some daylight after school, this presents as an incentive for children. The quicker your child successfully completes his or her homework, the quicker he or she can engage in outside privileges. In addition, there would be plenty of time for children to complete their homework before bedtime. Children who complete homework after dinner have less time to complete homework. It is very important for you to tell your child when he or she needs to begin completing homework rather than telling him or her the time that homework should be completed. For instance, if you tell your child that homework must be completed by 6:00pm, your child might feel like a failure if his or her homework extends beyond the designated time. In addition, your child might rush to complete his or her homework making many homework errors. Children typically find it very difficult completing homework after dinner primarily because of fatigue. Fatigue usually follows a heavy meal. Parents often extend their children’s daily bedtime in order for them to complete their homework. Parents should never extend their children’s bedtime because children need their sleep and rest in order to grow and to function properly the next day. 7th Unhealthy Belief: “My child refuses or forgets to bring homework home and there is nothing that I can do to change his or her behavior.” First of all, you need to develop a rule at home that states that homework must be brought home and completed daily. In addition, this rule must have its own unique consequence in the event that your child fails to bring homework home. Which ever consequence you choose to enforce, it is important that its duration lasts for one day, from the time your child arrives home from school till the time he or she goes to bed. It is equally important that the duration of the consequence last no more than one day per occurrence. If you consequent your child for more than one day per occurrence, your child will develop learned helplessness and will not be motivated to bring home or complete homework for the duration of the consequence making the consequence ineffective. In order for you to learn whether or not your child has homework each day, you should require him or her to bring a note pad to and from school detailing daily homework assignments. Each day, your child should be responsible for logging homework assignments as well as having the school teacher verify and sign the note pad. You should discuss the logistics of this technique with your child’s school teacher prior to its implementation. If your child claims that he or she forgets to bring home homework and/or the note pad, your child needs to be consequented at home. Consequencing your child will encourage him or her to remember to bring homework and/or the note pad home the next time. Please keep in mind that consequences always follow forgetfulness. Therefore, we should never fail to give children consequences when they forget specific tasks. If forgetfulness is a routine problem for your child that extends beyond homework, you should consider having him or her evaluated by a physician to rule out medical or psychological issues that might be contributing to forgetfulness. Sometimes, depression and stress contribute to forgetfulness. However, if your child routinely remembers other things except for his or her homework, your child might be attempting to manipulate you. It is my hope that the tips and techniques discussed in this article reduce the homework blues at your home. If you would like additional parenting tips and suggestions or would like to attend an online educational seminar, please feel free to log onto the Building Strong Families National Seminar’s website at <http://www.StrongFamilies.us>.

About the Author

Mark Lakewood, with a Masters Degree in Social Work, is a Relationship Specialist, Author, and a Motivational and Professional Speaker. As CEO of Building Strong Families National Seminars (<http://www.StrongFamilies.us>), he authored the “Sudden Compliance Program” (<http://www.SuddenCompliance.com>) designed to swiftly improve the behavior of children and the “Standing Up To Bullying” (<http://www.StandingUpToBullying.com>) onsite community-based bullying prevention program.

Source: <http://www.edarticle.com>