

Homework Help

Your child probably has more homework now that she's in middle school. Head off complaints by helping her develop habits that will pave the way to success.

The result will be better grades — and strong time-management and organizational skills to carry her through high school and beyond. Now that's a win-win!

.....

Establish a routine

Make homework a priority by having your middle grader schedule it into his daily routine. Here are some suggestions:

■ Start by discussing the best time to do homework. Does your child need downtime before settling into homework (say, after dinner), or does he prefer getting his work done right after school? Let him experiment with each time to see when he works best.

■ Have him try different homework conditions, too. Some students work better in silence, others with background music. If your middle grader has trouble concentrating at the kitchen table, he might like stretching out on his bed.

■ Make homework a daily event. If your child has nothing due the next day, he can use the time to study for a quiz or work on a long-term assignment.



■ When your youngster chooses extracurricular activities, have him consider his homework load. Remind him to allow extra hours for projects and tests.

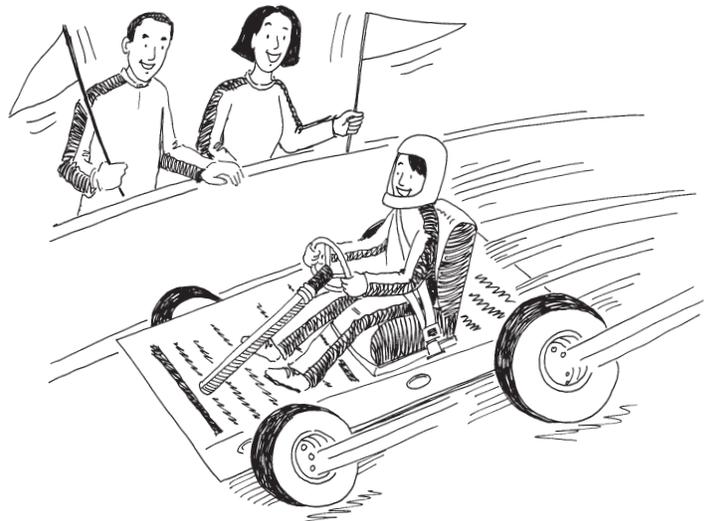
■ Middle graders love to hang out with friends. Suggest that

they get together after finishing homework or on days when your child has less work, such as Friday.

■ Decide if and when television, video games, and computer play fit into the schedule. Consider limiting screen time to an hour a day.

■ Keep school supplies handy, and make sure your youngster knows where to find them. Include basics like pencils and paper, as well as a dictionary, a calculator, a thesaurus, and an atlas. For writing and research assignments, give him time on the family computer, or take him to the library to use a computer there.

■ Be sure your child has a plan for bringing home assignments and books. Suggest a calendar or an agenda book for jotting down homework as it's given. Then, at the end of the school day, he can see at a glance what he needs.



Provide support

To get the most out of homework, your child needs to complete the work herself. Resist the urge to leap in and solve problems for her. Use these ideas for supporting her efforts:

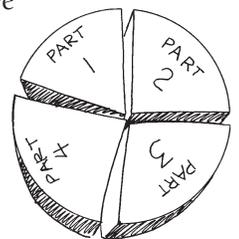
■ Before she begins, have your middle grader explain the directions to you to make sure she understands them. Encourage her to reread them when she finishes. Did she follow the instructions exactly?

■ Help her answer her own questions when she gets stuck. If she asks, "What's the difference between a physical change and a chemical change?" you can say, "Let's read the chapter together and see if you can spot it."

■ Review homework to make sure it's complete. Let your youngster find mistakes herself. For example, if you notice a math error, have her show you how she did the problem.

■ Discuss a plan for tackling her work. She might do harder assignments first and save easier ones for later. Or she might start with her least-favorite subject and save the best for last.

■ Help your child break large projects into smaller chunks. *Example:* For a geography report, she would do research first, then make an outline, write the report, and finally revise and proofread it. Suggest that she schedule each task in her planner.



Note: If your middle grader is struggling with homework, call or e-mail her teacher. She will have ideas to help.

continued



Keep it interesting

Your child may never love homework, but there are ways to make it more enjoyable. Try these tips:

- Encourage your middle grader to start a homework group. Having friends around will make homework more fun, and he'll learn more, too. Quizzing each other and explaining material helps children remember facts.

- Suggest that your youngster view assignments from a different angle. He might present an oral history report like a newscaster doing the evening news. Or he could turn a book report into an e-mail exchange between two characters. *Note:* Make sure he checks with his teacher before taking a new approach.

- Involve the whole family with games like "Social Studies Jeopardy." Have your child write questions and answers on index cards and act as the host. Making the cards and checking answers are great ways to study.



- Suggest that your middle schooler take breaks, especially when tackling long or tough assignments. He might work for 30 minutes and then take a 10-minute break to shoot baskets or eat a healthy snack.

- Plan a family activity to celebrate the end of a big assignment. For example, visit an aquarium when your child finishes a science project on sea life.

- Find different places to do homework. Try the library, a coffee shop, the bookstore, or outside by a stream. Or see if your school, community center, or YMCA offer homework clubs.

Look online

How can you help your middle grader find answers when she's stumped on her homework? Help may be as close as a computer screen. Here are a few places to look.

General

- **Homework Spot** • www.homeworkspot.com

Visitors to Homework Spot can click on a subject, from foreign languages to technology. The site also links to reference materials and public libraries, allows your child to ask experts questions, and offers a note-taking section.

Math

- **Web Math** • www.webmath.com

Kids will get advice on everything from basic arithmetic to percents, square roots, and algebra. Your child can type in a problem and receive a step-by-step method for solving it.

Language Arts

- **Big Dog's Grammar: A Bare Bones Guide to English** • <http://aliscot.com/bigdog>

Big Dog is a quick guide to understanding parts of speech, putting sentences together, and solving common writing

problems. Plus, the site includes topics such as using parallel structure and active voice. (Also available in Spanish.)

History

- **EyeWitness to History** • www.eyewitnesstohistory.com

Does your youngster need an inspiring idea or a source for a history paper? Encourage her to browse through dozens of first-person accounts of history from ancient times to the present day.

Science

- **Mad Sci Network** • www.madsci.org

A team of scientists answers questions submitted by students. Your child can search by subject, grade level, or keyword to find thousands of answers. She can also browse the Mad Library, which has links to Web sites and recommends books on science topics from anatomy to zoology.



Middle Years