

# Psych Savvy

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

John Stamm, Ph.D.  
Supervisor

Bill Stockton  
Editor

\*\*\*\*\*  
Developed by Charlotte Vilce, School Psychologist

February 1990  
\*\*\*\*\*

## HOMWORK - WHOSE JOB IS IT, ANYWAY?

Homework, work assigned for completion outside the school day is a fact of school life. In the early grades, it may be as simple as studying spelling words. As students progress, assignments become more complicated, and include projects that take weeks to finish. Homework is a method for teachers to provide practice and drill of academic skills; a way for parents to keep up with what's being learned; and, provides children with better understanding and mastery of school skills. The ultimate goal is the same for all three parties - to improve academic achievement.

Since the homework assignment is given at school, teachers have the initial job of seeing to it that homework is done. Research findings in this area suggest certain factors help increase this likelihood:

- 1 ) Assign well-planned, systematic homework closely tied to classroom instruction.
- 2 ) Provide students directions and expectations in such a clear manner that their understanding is fool proof.
- 3 ) Individualize assignments for students not likely to benefit from the normal one.
- 4 ) Grade or comment on homework to acknowledge student effort and progress.

When homework comes home, students and parents have to decide their roles in this process. Homework is the child's responsibility. Becoming responsible for one's own homework can begin to lay the groundwork for other responsibilities in life. So, what's a parent to do when he/she hears, "Will you help me with my homework?" No one wants their child to fail. But, by completing assignments parents show in subtle ways they doubt their child's ability to successfully complete independent tasks. Such action implies that they really believe their children are helpless.

Yet there are guidelines parents can follow to promote homework completion. John Rosemond, a family psychologist in private practice in North Carolina, has outlined a six-point plan for parents to become effective homework consultants, rather than participants, to their children. His suggestions include:

- 1 ) Provide a private, personal area, such as a desk.
- 2 ) Help your child only if he asks for it of his own initiative. This not only means that you don't ask, "Need any help?", but also you don't rush to the rescue when you hear pounding on the desk and screams of frustration.
- 3 ) You can refuse to help with homework when you feel the child is asking for help simply to have someone else do the thinking.
- 4 ) Parents helping with homework should be for one of two reasons: First, because

the child is stuck at some point, has given it his all, and legitimately needs adult guidance to get unstuck. Second, because he/she has finished the homework, but wants someone to review it.

- 5) Parent help with homework should be brief. Giving examples, clarifying directions, and providing guidance and support are appropriate. Actually doing any of the child's homework is not. Fifteen minutes is the upper limits of time involvement, with 5 minutes being average. If it looks like 15 minutes isn't going to do it, then parents should have the child refer the problem back to the teacher, even if it means the assignment will be late.
- 6) Parents should set an upper time limit on homework. The child should be responsible for deciding when to begin, but parents decide when to call time. The deadline should be consistent, say 8:30 p.m. every day, but can be temporarily suspended for special projects and when the child needs to study for major tests.

So rather than expecting mom or dad to complete homework, children can expect to do it on their own. Most will not have a problem with this, but some youngsters need help getting organized. To this end, Ginger Black, the author of Making the Grade suggests the following contract:

- 1) Record homework for tonight:  
\_\_\_\_\_ English/Language Arts, \_\_\_\_\_ Science, \_\_\_\_\_ Reading,  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other, \_\_\_\_\_ Social Studies, \_\_\_\_\_ Spelling, \_\_\_\_\_ Math.
- 2) Long Term Assignments: (Write them every day until finished)  
Subject                      Assignment                      Day Due                      Date Due
- 3) Check with my homework buddy to make sure I have the correct assignment.  
Checked with buddy? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no.
- 4) List the order in which I will do my homework: (hardest to easiest) \_\_\_\_\_,
- 5) Check off assignment as I finish. Use a colored pen or marker.
- 6) After school today (Today is \_\_\_\_\_).  
Activity                      Time of Activity                      Time Returned Home
- 7) List the order I will do everything, including after school activities: Example: Spelling, Soccer, T.V., Math, Dinner, Bath.
- 8) Put all completed homework in a notebook or folder. Put all school materials by your door before going to bed.
- 9) RELAX

Homework, then, is actually a 3-way partnership among teachers, parents, and students. Each partner can help assure student success in school.

### Resources

Black, Ginger E., M.Ed., Making the Grade. How To Help Your Child Have A Happy and Successful School Experience. New York, 1989, Carol Publishing Group.

Keith, Timothy. "Children and Homework", Children's Needs: Psychological Perspectives. Washington D.C: The National Association of School Psychologists, 1987, pp 275-282.

Rosemond, John. "Parents, Kids Need Homework Guidelines", newspaper article in the Anchorage Daily News, August, 1986.