

Handling Homework

Excerpt from *The Floppy Sleep Game Book*, by Patti Teel
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Limited amounts of homework in the primary grades may be beneficial; however, it should not be excessive...especially in the lower grades. The amount of homework assigned varies greatly from school to school and from teacher to teacher. As a rule of thumb, the National Education Association and the Parent Teacher Association recommend that children in elementary school spend approximately ten minutes of homework per grade. For instance, a first grader would be expected to do ten minutes of homework while a fifth grader would spend 50 minutes.

However, the time it takes to complete homework will depend on a child's ability to buckle down and concentrate, his ability to do the work, and his level of perfectionism. What one child might complete in twenty minutes could very well take another child an hour. If you feel as if your child is unduly overloaded with homework that is either too difficult or lengthy, don't try to solve the problem by doing his work. While it's difficult for parents to see their child frustrated by inappropriate homework, doing too much of your child's work is likely to lead to an overly dependent child who may be convinced that he cannot accomplish anything on his own. Most teachers are willing to individualize homework assignments if a child is truly struggling. If your child has a learning disability that is interfering with his ability to complete the homework, or is a perfectionist who spends an inordinate amount of time doing it, work closely with your child's teacher. Often times, the work may be appropriate, but because your child either processes more slowly or is a perfectionist, it takes an excessive amount of time for him to complete it. If this is the case, see if your child can be assigned a shorter version of the same assignment. That way, he will still be learning the same things as the other students. If the work itself is too difficult, your child should be given a more appropriate assignment. Each child is an individual and sometimes what works for most, won't work for all. One of the purposes of homework is to begin to teach responsibility and for it to serve its purpose, a child must receive appropriate homework assignments.

In the upper elementary grades, other issues may determine the amount of homework a child brings home. While some children use all their spare time at school to complete homework, others bring it home because they are not applying themselves at school. Also, teachers begin to give their students longer assignments, expecting children to budget their time and work all week towards completing it. This leads to problems for a child who procrastinate and attempts to complete a week-long assignment in a single night. If your child has a tendency to put off his homework until the last minute, you need to be aware of his assignments. That way, you can help him to consistently chip away at a large project. Be aware that projects which require a great deal of planning and organization may be particularly difficult for a child with ADHD. Often, their problems become more noticeable in the upper grades when organization becomes more of an issue. If your child is frequently misplacing his papers and is generally unorganized, help him to set up a system to keep his papers organized.

Don't allow excessive homework to interfere with your child's sleep. Remember, getting a good night's sleep is the most important assignment of all!

1. Have a set time and place for homework. Have your child do his homework early enough in the evening so that he will have some down time before bed. Set up a spot for your child to complete his homework that is well lit, quiet, and away from the television.
2. Be available to help your child with his homework if he has questions, but don't do your child's work. Appropriate homework is a lesson in responsibility.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.