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HOMEWORK: HOW MUCH SHOULD PARENTS HELP?

The school year is well underway. Do your children have homework? How much do you help? Are you the one up until midnight completing the science project? Have you found the balance between “helping” and “doing it for them”?

The purpose of homework is to help children establish independent study habits, as well as explore what they know and do not know.

Helping children too much can be just as destructive as not helping at all. How do you know if you are helping too much? Here are some indicators:

- Continually providing answers or dictating sentences.
- Hovering over your children until their homework has been completed.
- Thinking in terms of “my homework” and “my grade”.

Too much help generally results in higher grades, but who is being graded? This may confuse the teacher as to what your child actually knows and what skills need strengthening. Your child is also affected. He or she loses confidence and becomes more dependent. The message heard is “you’re not capable”.

A better way to deal with homework is to **assist**, yet allow children to develop the skills needed to be successful. This can be done by monitoring and reviewing.

- Work with your children to determine a time and place to do homework.
- Find a convenient time to help when you aren’t rushed or preoccupied.
- Encourage children to read and follow any written directions they were given and make sure they understand what they are to do.
- Once children start their homework, give them time alone. Tell them you’ll check back in awhile. Don’t stay too close. When parents are in close proximity, children are tempted to ask for answers rather than hunt for them.
- When the homework has been completed, review it.

NOTE: Children with learning disabilities may require a different approach. Work with a professional to establish these special needs.

If you find assisting your children with homework leaves everyone angry and frustrated, consider having them call a classmate for help. This puts more responsibility on the child and reduces the emotional involvement.

If there continues to be confusion about an assignment, have your child get assistance from the teacher. This keeps the teacher in the loop, so the teacher can help too.

Teachers can also help parents, by clearly defining how much involvement they expect and providing clear instructions. By working together as a team, children will be able to work more independently, become more confident, and attain greater academic success.