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Ask Dr. Harold: Homework

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system that accommodates important factors you know about your child. Take that painful 90 minutes and break it into three 15-minute study sessions with 15 minutes of play or relaxation or physical activity in between. Children struggle with aspects of homework like starting or finishing or going too fast. Each of these has a different solution. A key parental mistake we all make is solving the problem before we know what the issues are. It is more efficient to help your child learn the material by finding out how their mind works rather than imposing the study habits that worked for you. Discuss the work with them. Try different solutions. Another key is to emphasize the learning not the grade. We coach our students to ask teachers how they can bring up their grade. We need to coach them to ask how they can learn to write a better paragraph.

What is homework?

Homework is a habit. Teachers may use it for all sorts of purposes but at the core it is a habit we build over time. It becomes easier with all of the aspects that help in building habits. Have a time and a place for your child to do homework. A hungry, hot, and tired kid will have difficulty building habits. We learn better with others sometimes. Have a couple of days of homework club a week and your kids will learn more about different ways to solve problems and different ways to learn. If you set aside some time for homework then the time is used for academic tasks. If there is no homework or they "got it done in class" then they have extra time to do some other creative, academically-oriented activity. The reality is that kids who resist and spend hours on homework in elementary school would have plenty of time to play if we were more consistent in helping them build study habits. You or your child should work with your teachers to learn what they are trying to accomplish with homework. Remind your child how good it feels to work hard and accomplish a goal. And reward your kid for learning that is done well, be it homework or playtime.

I was recently at a parent talk in a school and was hit with the question about homework. As a parent, I dealt and continue to deal with the Lamorinda homework that spawned the Race to Nowhere film and accompanying movement. As a faculty member at Santa Clara University, I am responsible for training teachers. There are peer reviewed research studies on both sides of the homework debate and I will leave that debate for another venue. Here is a psycho-educational breakdown of getting your kid to do what the teacher assigns.

Why do I have to do homework?

Kids have a very valid point when they ask this question. Teachers should be able to answer this question. It could be practice, it could be to strengthen a concept, it could be to connect practice to theory, or you could find they are just in the habit of giving it out. With standardized testing eating up instructional days and more requirements from state and national standards, teachers these days have much more to cover in less time. And don't forget, while you were in college and being young married people, information has been increasing in subject areas at a rate of over 60% a year. There is simply more history/science/English/mathematics to teach. Enforcing an assignment for a teacher becomes easier once you and your child know the purpose of the assignment.

Why do I have to do homework now?

In teacher training programs, the classic standard is to assign no more than 10 minutes of homework per grade. If you know what the teacher is trying to accomplish with the homework and you use this guide, then you can create a

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