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## How To Stop Fighting With Your Child Over Homework

Help your child develop good study skills and end the daily battles-forever!

My kid does not do his or her homework. What can I do?

It is a complaint I hear often from frustrated parents. As a psychologist specializing in the evaluation of youngsters with academic difficulties, I know that homework can become a major source of family strife, and I have found that the most useful role a parent can play on the homework scene is that of a consultant.

Like a consultant in the business world, the parent-consultant

- Helps on request.
- Negotiates a plan regarding the nature of that help and gives advice.
- Does not force his client to change.

It is an approach that works because you, as a parent, are acknowledging something important to your child:

"Getting your homework done is your responsibility, not mine. I cannot make you do it." That is the starting point for the end of all your battles.

Here is how to go about developing a consulting relationship with your young child or teenager:

- If your youngster chronically has trouble with assignments in class or with homework, request an evaluation through the school from a qualified psychologist or learning specialist to rule out a possible problem. Some children who find homework very difficult have a learning disability or an "output" problem-difficulty with written assignments despite adequate reading, spelling and general knowledge.
- Sit down with your child, and in a loving and calm manner-and in your own words-say something like: "I love you too much to continue fighting with you over homework. Neither of us likes these fights. I am ready to stop. In the past I have made the mistake of thinking that I could make you work harder or better. The fighting has not been fair to me because I have been beating my head against a wall, and it has not been fair to you because I have been acting as if it were my job to see that the work gets done when it is really your job. Also, learning can be really fun, but, if I am always hassling you, how can you possibly enjoy learning? I am ready to change. I still want to

help you when you need help, and I will be happy to be your homework consultant, but from now on I'm going to remember that getting your work done is your job."

- Explain that you will be delighted to help in a variety of ways as needed -- figuring out the best place and time to study, planning the work, understanding assignment directions, organizing and proofreading written reports, drilling on math facts or spelling words. Make it clear, however, that you will help only if your help is requested or is accepted when offered.
- Set time limits on your involvement. Indicate, for example, that you will be available between 6:30 and 7:30 every weekday evening, and then be ready at that time to help in a friendly, supportive manner. Work overtime only as a reward to your child for good effort.
- At the appointed homework hour, ask if your child would like your help. If the answer is no, do not badger, threaten, scold or ask a lot of questions about his assignments. If he declines help but panics at bedtime because work remains undone, be firm -- say, "It is now bedtime; you need your rest." If he chooses to work early in the morning to finish, that is his decision, but your helping time is from 6:30 to 7:30.
- Explain to your child that, while you cannot make him do the work, it is your job to provide a good environment for working. No television, computer games or other distractions will be allowed during homework hours.
- During your consultation time, keep the tone positive. Agree to take a short break if either of you feels frustrated. Focus on the youngster's successes. Praise efforts, acquisition of skills (rather than grades), completion of a difficult assignment and meeting self-set goals.
- Help your child develop her own system of rewards for completing homework goals. She may want to spend extra time with you or stay up late to watch a special TV show. If she does not meet a goal, respond with compassion: "I am sorry you were not able to meet your goals." Do not get angry or threaten punishment. Your job is to help her develop ways to motivate herself.

I think you can see that this approach does not convey the angry message, "You are on your own now, kid. I do not care what you do about your schoolwork." You are not "backing out"; on the contrary, becoming a parent-consultant gives you a graceful way of getting "back in" to a positive, helpful relationship with your child.

Give the plan a two or three week trial. If after that time you do not see positive results, consider seeking the help of a family therapist who is familiar with school-related problems.

And remember two things: Even the most conscientious parent has no obligation to feel anxious and miserable continually because a child does not do homework. And try to keep the problem in a reasonable perspective.

**Homework may seem very important to you now, but in the long run your child's self-esteem will be the key factor for success in life. Guard against damaging it in nightly squabbles over schoolwork.**

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