

Homework is a problem?

Let's talk

Homework probably causes more tension within families than any other issues relating to school. While parents need to understand that schools set homework because they are required to do so, the amount and nature of homework set is up to the school and the teacher.

It is usually best to agree a time when homework will be done and to stick to it. Involving the child in the decision about “when” means that s/he has some control and can choose a time, which avoids favourite programmes etc. Occasionally things will crop up and it will be difficult for homework to be done at the agreed time. Often it is best to allow the child to make a deal and offer an alternative time – it is helpful to add a parental condition like “If you do it then, I won't have to remind you/nag you will I – because if I don't then we can do this again.”

Bearing in mind the importance principle of all actions having consequences, a child who breaks the agreement loses the right to do a deal the next time. However once the situation is passed and the dust has settled, it is usually appropriate to begin negotiations once again.

Unfortunately not all homework tasks are set with due regard to the needs and abilities of individual children. Therefore a task that might take one child 15 minutes may take another 2 hours. Most schools publish homework guidelines about length of time expected – if your child cannot finish within the time, despite having worked conscientiously, it is best to stop them and write a note to school explaining the situation. This should be enough to ensure that a more suitable task is set next time.

Despite receiving a note from home, occasionally a teacher may respond negatively to an incomplete homework. In this situation it is best to make an appointment to see a senior person in the school to ensure that appropriate homework are set in future.

Occasionally a child forgets to do homework or deliberately chooses not to do it and then asks a parent to write/phone in and make an excuse. Failure to do so can result in tantrums etc but, in the long term, it is probably best to point out that some bad decisions carry consequences – and this is one of them! Parents may also choose to set a time on a Sunday evening after which there will be no help with homework to prevent requests at 10.00, when a child has spent the entire weekend in leisure and sleep.