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# How important is homework, and how much should parents help?

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In recent years, homework has become a very [hot topic](#). Many parents and educators have raised concerns about homework and questioned how effective it is in enhancing students' learning. There are also concerns that students may be getting too much homework, which ultimately interferes with quality family time and [opportunities for physical activity and play](#). Research suggests that these concerns may be valid. For example, [one study](#) reported that elementary school students, on average, are assigned three times the recommended amount of homework.

So what does the research say? What are the potential risks and benefits of homework, and how much is too much?

## Academic benefits

First, [research](#) finds that homework is associated with higher scores on academic standardized tests for middle and high school students, but not [elementary school students](#). A [recent experimental study](#) in Romania found some benefit for a small amount of writing homework in elementary students but not math homework. Yet, interestingly, this positive impact only occurred when students were given a moderate amount of homework (about 20 minutes on average).

## Non-academic benefits

The goal of homework is not simply to improve academic skills. Research finds that homework may have some non-academic benefits, such as [building responsibility, time management skills, and task persistence](#). [Homework](#) may also [increase parents' involvement](#) in their children's schooling. Yet, too much homework may also have some negative impacts on non-academic skills by reducing opportunities for [free play](#), which is essential for the development of language, cognitive, self-regulation and social-emotional skills. Homework may also [interfere with physical activity](#) and too much homework is associated with [an increased risk for being overweight](#). As with the research on academic benefits, this research also suggests that homework may be beneficial when it is minimal.

## What is the “right” amount of homework?

Research suggests that [homework](#) should not exceed 1.5 to 2.5 hours per night for high school students and no more than one hour per night for middle school students. Homework for elementary school students should be minimal and assigned with the aim of building self-regulation and independent work skills. Any more than this and homework may no longer have a positive impact.

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The [National Education Association](#) recommends 10 minutes of homework per grade and there is also some experimental evidence that backs this up.

## Overall translation

Research finds that homework provides some academic benefit for middle and high school students but is less beneficial for elementary school students. Research suggests that homework should be none or minimal for elementary students, less than one hour per night for middle school students, and less than 1.5 to 2.5 hours for high school students.

## What can parents do?

[Research](#) finds that parental help with homework is beneficial but that it matters more *how* the parent is helping rather than *how often* the parent is helping.

So how should parents help with homework, according to the research?

1. **Focus on providing general monitoring, guidance and encouragement, but allow children to generate answers on their own and complete their homework as independently as possible.** Specifically, [be present](#) while they are completing homework to help them to understand the directions, be available to answer simple questions, or praise and acknowledge their effort and hard work. [Research](#) shows that allowing children [more autonomy](#) in completing homework may benefit their academic skills.
2. **Only provide help when your child asks for it and step away whenever possible.** [Research](#) finds that too much parental involvement or intrusive and controlling involvement with homework is associated with [worse academic performance](#).

3. **Help your children to create structure and develop some routines that help your child to independently complete their homework.** Have a regular time and place for homework that is free from distractions and has all of the materials they need within arm's reach. Help your child to create a checklist for homework tasks. Create rules for homework with your child. Help children to develop strategies for increasing their own self-motivation. For example, developing their own reward system or creating a homework schedule with breaks for fun activities. [Research](#) finds that providing this type of structure and responsiveness is related to improved academic skills.
4. **Set specific rules around homework.** [Research](#) finds an association between parents setting rules around homework and academic performance.
5. **Help your child to view homework as an opportunity to learn and improve skills.** [Parents](#) who view homework as a learning opportunity (that is, a “mastery orientation”) rather than something that they must get “right” or complete successfully to obtain a higher grade (that is, a “performance orientation”) are more likely to have children with the same attitudes.
6. **Encourage your child to persist in challenging assignments and emphasize difficult assignments as opportunities to grow.** [Research](#) finds that this attitude is associated with student success. [Research](#) also indicates that more challenging homework is associated with enhanced academic performance.
7. **Stay calm and positive during homework.** [Research](#) shows that mothers showing positive emotions while helping with homework may improve children's motivation in homework.
8. **Praise your child's hard work and effort during homework.** This type of [praise](#) is likely to increase motivation. In addition, research finds that putting more effort into homework may be associated with enhanced development of [conscientiousness](#) in children.
9. **Communicate with your child and the teacher about any problems your child has with homework and the teacher's learning goals.** [Research](#) finds that open communication about homework is associated with increased academic performance.

*Cara Goodwin, PhD, is a licensed psychologist, a mother of three and the founder of [Parenting Translator](#), a nonprofit newsletter that turns scientific research into information that is accurate, relevant and useful for parents.*

