

## **Easing Homework Woes (Please forgive any errors in transcription)**

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As kids enter junior high and high school, they are faced with a sea change in the sheer volume of expectations and requirements for them to complete independent work outside of class time. Moreover, adolescents are faced with longer term assignments that require multiple steps done over a period of time. For the most part, in many elementary schools, teachers and schools gradually prepare children for assessments and tests using a concept called homework, which basically means added or extra practice independently with the skill or task. Increasingly, this adolescence transition from elementary and middle school, fewer daily assignments are given, and instead, adolescents are faced with the task or assignment detailing "study chapter 2" or "read section 3" with no specific written assignment necessary to be completed.

The advent of electronic monitoring and online access to students day-to-day performance in class is a blessing and a curse for many parents. For children that do well and never struggle with completion of daily assignments, this often serves as an echo chamber for them to be praised. For many others, who periodically struggle with completion and return of homework assignments, the day-to-day checking can easily become obsessive, translating into frequent conflicts and arguments over homework and grades. In the past, parents may have been mailed home midterm grades recorder grades, now they have access to every single particular assignment that that child has completed and returned or failed to do so.

The daily checking and monitoring for those children that struggles with completing work can also result in elaborate and even at times heated disagreements as to the validity or rightness of any particular grade or outstanding assignment. This causes and results in children often engaging in what I call "The Homework Lying Game", where parents will ask or inquire about a homework assignment or missing task, and the child generally makes a statement to the extent such as I have turned it in, but the teacher has not entered it. This places the parent in a difficult position of having to prove the child wrong, and oftentimes parents spend a great deal of time emailing communicating with teachers about the child's statements. This entire game is wrong on 2 accounts. Firstly, the homework in education is the child's and not the parents responsibility. The more the parents approach the task like a manager, the more they end up having to pay the price in the form of conflict and dishonesty. The other issue that this hits is a shifting of responsibility of the child's education away from the shoulders of the child themselves, and onto the shoulders of the parent. Not only does the parent have to play detective, but the parents often feel as though they care more about their child's grade than the child does themselves.

In my work with families, I like to change the dynamics of the conversation itself, while also placing the burden of responsibility of homework and their education solely on the shoulders of the child. In my work with families, I often recommend the following:

- I like to renegotiate the meaning of homework. Specifically, I rename this study time and specifically define this as the completion or attention towards school related activities outside of school, in a public place, free from distraction or electronic devices. This time, or at least a portion of it, would be inescapable in constant throughout the week. I will often say to families that I wish that I could eliminate the requirement for homework entirely, and structure the school day like many adults structure their workday. Specifically, that adults often have to remain at work until the work itself has been completed. While children often sheer at the 1st statement, the idea of having to stay at school until 5 o'clock often results in some unhappy faces.
- I like to create a contract with the child outlining expectations and removing parents from the equation of the day-to-day checking of grades and assignments. Generally, I would recommend that parents check on or log on to their child's online classroom no more than once weekly, and only for an overall check of their performance across classes. As much as parents want to spend time scrolling through assignment after assignment, I encourage parents to only look at the overall summary grade. The contract or negotiated agreement between the parents and children should relate to overall expectations in performance, rather than the specifics of any particular assignment/project (as this would encourage parental micromanaging).