

Schoolwork and stress: 5 ways to help a child

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If you're still plagued by show-up-for-the-final-and-realize-you've-never-been-to-class nightmares, you know schoolwork anxiety is no small matter. So how do you help your kids cope before stress tanks their confidence and their grades? Here are five steps to help strike the right balance and keep schoolwork from overwhelming your child.

Talk to the teachers. "Establish a dialogue on homework policies from the beginning, including how involved you're expected to be," suggests Susan Kane, editor-in-chief of Parenting: School Years magazine.

Make sure you understand his or her definition of homework. "Typically the purpose is to practice what is already known, with the theory that time on task helps them learn," says Frances Stott, professor of child development at the Erikson Institute. "Find out if the material is being taught in class. And if it's something the child is having trouble with, ask if the teacher can provide extra support during class."

If you sense your child is overloaded, request another meeting. "Ask how long she expects her assignments to take," Kane says. "Compare that to the 10-minutes-per-grade-level guideline (how long homework should take) and how long it actually takes your child."

"Avoid being accusatory, but rather enlist the teacher as an ally. Together, develop a solution."

Find the optimal homework time.

After school works great for some kids, not so great for others. "Some children are really alert and can do homework in the morning," Stott says. "For some children you're asking for trouble dragging them out of bed to do homework. For some children it can be helpful to have some active playtime after school. A lot depends on your child's temperament."

Make a schedule. Once you've established peak performance time, put it in



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School-related challenges can take their toll on a child's confidence.

writing. "On Sunday night, make a schedule for the week," Kane says. "Put big things like homework assignments and after-school activities on a calendar, so when a task is completed your child can cross it off."

Seek outside help. Calling on a third party can be a huge help. Most public libraries offer on-site homework help. Many Web sites offer online tutoring (homeworkhelp.com is a good place to start). Then there are good old-fashioned tutors. "Tutoring comes in many forms these days: expensive learning centers, private tutors, homework helpers," Kane says. "Which one, if any, to pick depends on your child's temperament, learning style and needs, not to mention what you can afford."

Stay positive. "You don't want to add to the stress," Stott says. "You want to add to the coping."

"If you're overly critical of your child's work, she'll get discouraged," Kane says. "Remember that she's just a kid and is learning to handle an increasingly large workload with each grade level. Focus on the effort or creativity she puts in, rather than on errors or how much time she spends on a project."

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