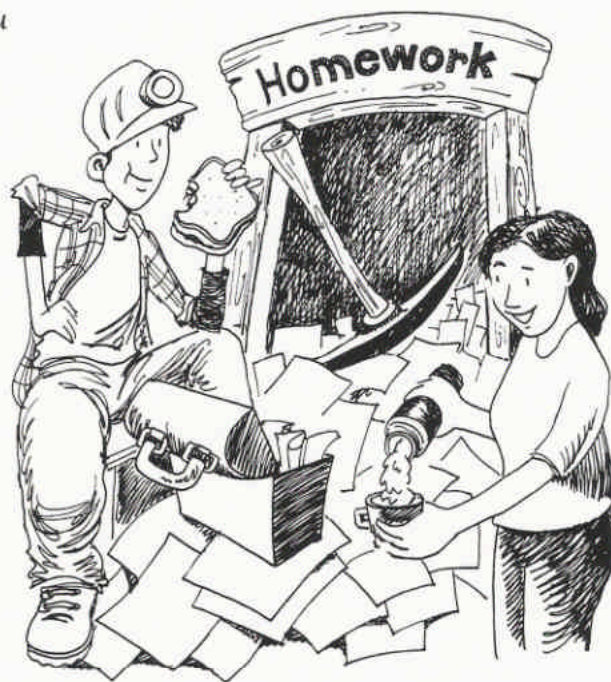


Whose homework is this, *anyway?*

You know your middle grader's report is due tomorrow, but you haven't seen him open the book yet. What about that battery-operated volcano for science class? The supplies are still in the wrapper.

You know that homework is an important part of learning, but how involved should you be? Too much concern may cause kids to depend too heavily on their parents. Too little concern may let academic problems go unnoticed.

This report will show parents and middle graders how to work together for study success—and avoid the question, "Whose homework is this, anyway?"



What your middle grader can do

Homework improves grades, provides practice for study skills, and increases learning. That's why it's important for students to complete their homework. Here's how your middle grader can get the job done.

Get assignments

Remind your child that it's her job to write down assignments. She may need to copy them from the blackboard. (Some schools post assignments on Web sites or record them on homework hotlines.) Before your middle grader leaves class, she should know when assignments are due and if she needs extra resources (Internet, library research) or special supplies (index cards, poster board, etc.).

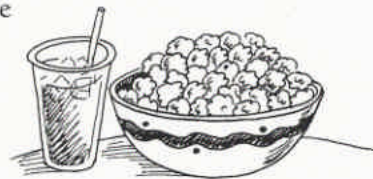


Make a plan

When your middle grader gets home from school, he should glance over assignments and come up with a study plan. Generally it's a good idea to tackle tougher or longer assignments first. He should be able to follow most homework and project instructions without supervision, but let him know you're available if he needs you. For long-term projects, he may want to keep track of deadlines on a calendar.

Keep a routine

Encourage your child to begin homework at the same time each day to make learning a habit. What time is best? Possibilities include immediately after school or later in the evening when she's had a chance to relax. If she's involved in outside activities, she might do better with a flexible schedule that allows her to study after school on some days and after dinner on others. Within reason, let her decide.



Create a study area

Many children work best in a special study area, like at a bedroom desk or the kitchen table. However, some kids do better sprawling on the living room floor. Consider letting your middle grader choose where he'll work—he's more likely to stay on task when he's comfortable. His work area should have adequate lighting and a stash of homework supplies, such as pens, pencils, paper, and a dictionary.

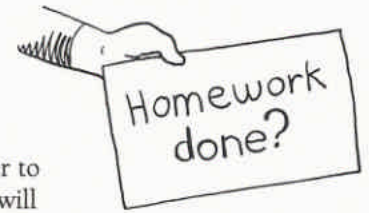
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Middle Years



Give reminders

An occasional prompt, such as “How’s the draft of your report coming along?” may be all that’s needed to encourage your middle grader to complete a project. Nagging will only make your child more resistant. But watch for signs that he’s frustrated or seems to be spending too much time on his homework. If your child consistently has trouble with assignments, ask his teachers for advice.



Promote independence

When your child was younger, she probably readily handed over her homework for you to read. Middle graders are more independent. If your child asks you to read her assignment, point out spelling or other errors, but let her correct them. The teacher needs to see her problem areas. And, to avoid a flare-up of hurt feelings, don’t criticize her work.



Provide praise

If you notice your middle grader studying hard, tell him how proud you are. Praising strong effort encourages your child to keep learning. A warm comment, such as “Nice job on that science project,” can give him confidence when he dives into social studies.

Stay positive

Try to keep a positive, upbeat attitude about your middle grader’s homework—your child just might follow your lead. Remind her to take an occasional short break to make homework more pleasant. She could take a 10-minute walk, have a snack, or listen to a couple of her favorite songs. But be sure she gets back on track after the break.

Team with teachers

Ask your child’s teachers about homework rules and how you can help with assignments. Find out what kinds of projects your child should expect. Provide your phone number, and e-mail address if available, and encourage the teachers to contact you if problems arise. The sooner you are aware of a problem, the more quickly a solution can be found.



Remember: With your guidance and encouragement, your middle grader will learn to work independently.

Increase concentration

Some middle graders need calm surroundings to focus on homework. Others may study better with low-volume background music. But television is usually too much for anyone to ignore. Your child should keep the TV off during study time so her mind is tuned in to her homework.

Find ways to improve

When graded homework is returned to your child, have him read any comments the teacher wrote. If he received a poor grade, he should think about the reasons. Did he write down the assignment correctly? Did he follow the instructions? Discovering what went wrong can keep him from repeating mistakes.

What you can do

The key is for you to stay involved and monitor your child’s homework without doing it for her. Consider these suggestions.

Offer support

When your middle grader asks you questions, guide her in the right direction. For example, instead of answering her question, “Mom, how many feet are in a mile?” ask, “Where do you think you can find the answer?” Your role is to show her how to resolve problems so she will learn to do it on her own. You can also help by quizzing her on test questions or discussing essay topics.

Maintain a schedule

Whenever possible, match your household’s schedule with your child’s study time. If homework is done from 6 to 7 p.m. each day, make this a quiet time for the entire family. Consider working on your own project (read a book or balance the checkbook) while he studies. This will help him stay focused.

Middle Years