



Family and Consumer Sciences

# Family Ties

## Back to School

### Homework Help – Getting Off To A Good Start

It's 4 p.m. and your child has a book report due, a quiz to study for and soccer after dinner. You know the evening would run smoother if only he'd do his homework now. He, of course, has other ideas.

Sound familiar? You're not alone.

Homework can be a battle for some kids. Others seem to breeze through the worksheets and dioramas without any trouble at all. Regardless, every family benefits when the homework rules are clear, well-established -- and rarely negotiable.

#### Create a homework plan

Here are some tips to creating a homework plan that works for you:

**Set a schedule.** Just like you have a time for dinner and bed, establish a time for homework. Bear in mind that each child might need a different schedule. Some do best getting their work done after school -- they're too exhausted later. Others need to unwind first.

**Create a study nook.** Maybe it's the kitchen table or a desk -- doesn't matter. The important point is that your kids have a regular place to do their homework. Make a homework box. Pack a school box with all the supplies your kids will need to complete homework: glue stick, pencil, crayons, ruler, protractor. Not having to scramble for supplies will make finishing homework much less stressful.

#### Whose homework is it, anyway?

It's important to remember that doing the homework isn't your job -- no matter how much your child struggles. Help your child, yes, but once you take the pencil into your own hand -- you've crossed the line.

By the time your child is in fifth grade, he or she should be showing signs of independence on the homework front. It's not a good idea to micro-manage their homework at this point. It's crucial that they learn to work independently -- and accept the consequences if they don't.

How do you know if your child is on top of their game? Grades. If your child is slipping, then it's time to step in and talk about homework.

It's important for the teacher to know if your child is struggling with a particular assignment. Sometimes sending a note to the teacher is helpful so he or she can give your child some extra attention on the topic.



#### So what is a parent's job when it comes to homework?

- \* For one, stay on top of the assignments due. Some teachers send home a list of assignments; others have web sites. Find out how your child's teacher operates.
- \* Praise your child's efforts.
- \* If your child struggles, try to get to the bottom of the difficulty. Is it organizational skills? Reading troubles? Boredom?
- \* Try and make it fun. Maybe put out a fun snack for homework time, or agree to a game or outside play when homework's finished.

By: Matt Devereaux, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist - Child Development

# Use A Positive Approach To Help Teens With Homework



As parents, we want our teens to succeed in school, especially in the area of academics. However, if you truly want to help your teen succeed in school, do not interfere too much with their home work. Make sure your teens knows they can come to you when they hit a snag, but let your teens learn the importance of working independently. Praising his or her hard work and take note of your teen's efforts and determination. These actions by parents are critical to motivate your teen to succeed in school and in life. With your support, homework can be a positive experience for your teen.

It is important to remember that in the later grades, when your teen has multiple teachers, homework can really add up. Also, as the work gets harder and harder, some students may have a more difficult time completing assignments, doing them correctly, or simply staying interested.

Communicating positively with your teen is the key factor in helping your teen understand why homework is so important. Remember that you should first be a listener - and not do all the talking.

Here are some common homework situations and how parents might approach the problem:

- \* **If your teen is battling with homework**, make an appointment with their teacher to discuss the problem. When schoolwork becomes more difficult, it isn't unusual to find a previously undiagnosed learning disability.

- \* **If your teen just isn't concerned about homework**, motivation techniques may help. First, letting your teen know you respect the time and effort put forth is powerful motivation for your teen to continue doing schoolwork. It is also important that you praise your teen for his or her effort - not just correctness.

- \* **If you're concerned that your teen has too much or too little homework**, talk with his or her teacher(s). Usually when the teacher explains the assignment objectives or review concepts taught in the classroom to you, it will help you understand the homework policies. In return you can make sure that your teen is grasping what's being taught.

- \* **If your teen fails to do or turn in homework**, let them know that you are aware that they had not done their homework assignment. As you talk, tell your teen you're concerned and ask how you can help. This approach encourages honest, two-way communication, rather than

a one-way lecture about homework. Don't place blame or criticize your teen for failing to complete a homework assignment. It is important to set up some consequences for your teen if he or she consistently hands in homework late or not at all. The repercussions should be immediate and short term. For example, don't allow your teen to leave the house until assignments are completed. However, don't strip your teen of all privileges until the next report card; that can destroy all motivation. Also, it is not a good idea to terminate involvement in sports or school clubs because those activities teach self-discipline and social skills.

- \* **If your teen is spending too much time doing homework**, it's important to remember that everyone learns in different ways. Some need breaks, whereas others work better with a time limit. With this in mind, talk to your child first to find out if he or she is stuck on certain tasks and understands the directions. If you are still concerned, then make an appointment and talk to your teens teacher(s).

- \* **If your teen always says he or she has no homework**, you should contact your teen's teacher. If it turns out that homework has been assigned and your teen hasn't been completing it, you could ask the teacher to send home a homework assignment sheet so that you are aware of the homework assigned.

- \* **If you suspect that your teen is cutting classes**, you should immediately talk to your child calmly. Then, contact your teen's teacher(s) or school counselor to discuss your teen's performance. Also ask for suggestions on how you can help to ensure that your child actually attends school regularly.

No matter what problems you face, don't get into a struggle over homework with your teen. If your teen complains about their homework being too hard or your teen seems to be really struggling with homework assignments, this could indicate a problem, such as ADHD, or vision or hearing difficulties. However, most of the time, a student simply needs to develop better study habits, be more detailed when writing down assignments, and then keep them in one place so both you and your teen will know exactly what assignments are due and when.

By: Judy Cloud Berryhill, MS  
Extension Specialist - Adolescent Development

# Teen Friendships



During the preteen and teen years, children become less “family-centered” and more “friend-centered.” Having friends and developing new friendships are important parts of their lives. Friends begin to play a new and much larger part of their lives, and these friendships begin to teach them some valuable lessons. During their childhood, they have learned to ‘play well with others’, however, developing independent friendships is a different matter. Preteens and teens start to take more control in deciding whether or not to be someone’s friend, instead of their parents making the ‘play dates.’ Parents must give their teenager some freedom in choosing whom they want to hang out with. It is important that parents understand that in the teen years, friendship is a whole new ball game.

Parents can help their teen in choosing their friends, but they must realize that the final decision remains with their teen. Using teachable moments to talk about what makes a good friend is an effective approach. Here are some points parents should remember when talking to their teenagers about friendships. . . .

- \* You will have many friends throughout your life.
- \* Honesty is one of the most important components in a friendship.
- \* Sometimes friends hurt each other, but they must learn to apologize and forgive.
- \* Friends will influence each other, both in a positive way and in a negative way.
- \* While friendships are usually based on things you have in common, you are still an individual.
- \* Friends help you explore, make choices, and learn how to compromise, solve problems, behave, and appreciate others’ views and likes.
- \* It is essential that you choose your friends wisely and that you benefit from the friendship.
- \* You must learn the skills needed to make and maintain a friendship and also the skills to end a friendship.
- \* You should have friends from both genders.
- \* It takes time to make a good friend, but it is worth the effort.
- \* Spending time with your friends will help you get to know their character, so you will know if you can trust them with your feelings and your secrets.
- \* A friend will help you define who you are and the kind of person you want to be.
- \* A good friendship will make you feel good about yourself.

By: Judy Cloud Berryhill, MS  
Extension Specialist - Adolescent Development

# **USDA OFFERS ADVICE FOR PACKING SAFE SCHOOL LUNCHES**



School bells are tolling around the country as students begin a new school year. Although millions buy lunch at school cafeterias, millions more bring their lunch in the familiar paper bag or lunch box.

"Now is the time for students to not only learn their ABC's, but also food safety basics when bringing lunch to school," says Bessie Berry, Manager of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's nationwide, toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline. "Safe 'bag' lunches are as important as learning math and science. In fact, food safety is a science."

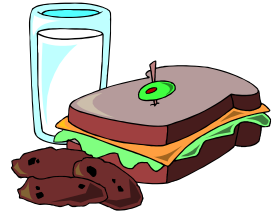
Berry said that by following some simple food safety rules, students can avoid getting sick from a lunch that was not handled properly. Here are some basic tips for carrying a safe lunch to school:

## **KEEP FOODS CLEAN**

Keep everything clean when packing the lunch. That not only goes for the food, but also food preparation surfaces, hands and utensils. Use hot, soapy water. Keep family pets away from kitchen counters. "Wash your hands before you prepare or eat food," Berry explains.

## **KEEP COLD FOODS COLD**

The best way to keep food cold is with an insulated lunch box. When packing lunches, include either freezer gel packs widely available in stores or cold food items such as fruit, or small frozen juice packs. Nestle perishable meat, poultry or egg sandwiches between these cold items. Sandwiches can also be made ahead of time and kept refrigerated or frozen before placing in the lunch box.

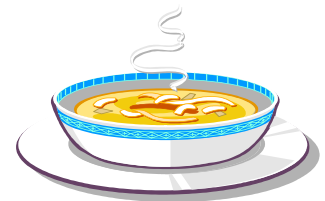


Freezer gel packs will hold cold foods until lunch time, but generally will not work for all-day storage. "Any perishable leftovers after lunch should be discarded and not brought home," Berry advises.

Instead of the insulated lunch box, can brown paper bags or plastic lunch bags be used to store cold foods? "These are OK, but do not work as well as insulated lunch boxes because the bags tend to become soggy and do not retain the cold as well," Berry explains. "If you must use paper or plastic lunch bags, create layers by double bagging to help insulate the food." Also, control the environment where the lunch bag or box is kept at school to help keep foods cold. Keep out of direct sunlight and away from radiators or other heat sources.

## **KEEP HOT FOODS HOT**

Foods like soup, chili and stew need to stay hot. Use an insulated bottle stored in an insulated lunch box. Fill the bottle with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated bottle closed until lunch to keep the food hot.



For more information on packing safe lunches for school (and yes, work, too!) call the toll-free nationwide Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. In the Washington, D.C. area, the number is 202-720-3333. The Hotline is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern Time, year-round. Also, an extensive selection of timely food safety recordings are available 24 hours a day, every day, by using a touch-tone phone and the "user-friendly" menu which prompts callers.



# **KEEPING FAMILY TIME A PRIORITY**

In the fall, as another school year begins, so does the hectic schedule that keeps families on the run and feeling out of control. In addition to getting children to and from school, many parents are faced with getting children to and from extracurricular school activities, sports, church, and other enrichment opportunities. Child care can be another scheduling issue.



Many parents find that in their efforts to provide as many positive experiences as possible for their children, they don't have time for positive experiences with their families. Ill tempers, stress and exhaustion may be common in these families. How can parents provide enriching experiences for their children and themselves and still find time for family activities?

## **REDUCE OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES**

It is wonderful to be able to provide extra opportunities for children to have fun, learn, and grow, but too much of anything is bad. If your family schedule is out-of-control, begin by writing everyone's activities on a calendar. Identify which are the most time-consuming. Have family members choose one major time-consuming activity or two smaller activities to give up so that every minute is not scheduled. Let your children help make decisions about what has to go. Include your own activities in the list of items to potentially cut. If you golf every Saturday morning, try reducing to every other Saturday to carve out time for your family or take one of your children with you every other time to create some individual time with them. Stress that these changes are not punishment, but trying to achieve balance in your family life. Everyone will need to give up something in order to create time for family.

## **TAKE CONTROL OF THE MEDIA**

Take the television and computer out of children's bedrooms. They will be more likely to spend time in family space if they have to go there to watch TV or log-on to the Internet. However, don't use watching TV or playing video games together as a substitute for activities that can promote family discussions. Make a rule to turn off the TV during mealtime. Try having one night a week as no TV night.

## **REINSTATE THE FAMILY MEAL**

Researchers have found that children who eat meals, especially evening meals, with their families on a regular basis are less likely to be involved in drug use, delinquent acts, or sexual activity. Also, they tend to make better grades and have more nutritious diets. Have a family meeting and mark the dates that your family will eat together on the calendar. Make sure that nothing interferes with those dates. Family meals don't have to be elaborate. You can bring the meal in, or fix something quick and easy. The real purpose is to give family members a chance to talk about their day and enjoy each other's company. Don't use meal times to handle discipline issues.

## **DESIGNATE A REGULAR FAMILY NIGHT**

The family that plays together stays together. Plan a family night once each week or at least once each month. Plan to do something that everyone can enjoy. It might be board games at home with popcorn for a snack; going bowling together, renting a movie and eating pizza or veggies and dip, or riding bikes together. Whatever you choose, make it your top priority for that day.

You owe it to yourself and to your children to make your family a top priority this year.

By: Denise J. Brandon, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist - Family Relations

**For More Information  
Contact Your County Extension Office**