

# TODAY'S FUTURE

## Take a Hike Day (November 17)



"Of all exercises  
walking is the best."  
~Thomas Jefferson

It's a beautiful time of  
the year to get  
outdoors and  
experience the fall  
colors!

## Parents & Homework: Helpful or Harmful?

For parents who grew up in the United States, homework is a fact of life – as American as apple pie. Many educators believe homework is an essential tool for helping children learn. They believe homework can help children develop important study skills, learn how to manage time and encourage independence and responsibility.

For children and parents, homework can sometimes seem like a burden that can cause frustration and tears. It may also take time away from families having fun together.

Research by Dr. Harris Cooper at Duke University shows children who do more homework in high school (up to 90 minutes) tend to do better in school, but there is little evidence for homework affecting learning during the elementary years. Many experts agree homework can have both positive and negative effects on children's learning and attitudes towards school.

There are many things parents can do to help with homework. But more importantly, HOW they help can determine whether the experience is helpful rather than harmful.

**What You Can Do** — Parents can help children develop good study habits if they:

- Take an active interest in their children's homework by finding out what assignments are, talking with them about assignments and looking over completed work.
- Set aside a regular time that works for your child and your family. Help your children manage their time and get organized so homework isn't done just before bed or at the last minute.
- Pick a place that has enough room to work and lighting to see — it doesn't have to be fancy!
- Reduce distractions by turning off the TV. This could be a "quiet time" for others in your household, and a time when adults can set an example by reading or working on things like balancing the checkbook.
- Be willing to help (like taking them to the library or getting materials they might need).
- Find out about teachers' homework policy and talk with them if you are concerned, or if you just want to give them feedback.
- Provide support and encouragement, especially when they are frustrated.



### How You Help Matters!

Homework can be frustrating for students and for parents as well. Researchers have found how parents help children, especially those who are struggling with schoolwork, can determine whether homework helps or hurts children's learning and motivation in school. Here are some suggestions on HOW to help with homework.

**Let children take the lead — support their independence and self-reliance and be less controlling and intrusive.**

Dr. Eva Pomerantz at the University of Illinois has found when parents are controlling, struggling children actually begin to do more poorly in school. Being controlling means:

- doing assigned work for children,
- “taking over” and telling children what to do or how to do it, or
- using threats or punishment.

According to Dr. Pomerantz, controlling parents might actually prevent children from developing important skills. Although parents might feel like they are “helping” they may be unintentionally undermining children’s confidence in their abilities.

Being controlling might be especially detrimental for how girls feel about their abilities in math and science. University of Illinois researchers Ruchi Bhanot and Jasna Jovanovic found parents who were more intrusive had girls who were less confident about their math abilities. Being intrusive includes:

- giving help without being asked,
- checking homework without being asked, or
- frequently reminding them to do homework.

**Stay positive.** Dr. Pomerantz has also found when parents can manage to stay positive while helping with homework that may be frustrating, children are more likely to be persistent and more motivated in school. According to Dr. Pomerantz, “Being able to put frustration aside and focus on what is enjoyable about the work is key to promoting children’s motivation in school. When the work itself is not enjoyable — for example, there is a lot of boring repetition — parents might focus on the positives of working together.”

Source: Aaron Ebata, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign, 2012

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## Practical Strategies for Building Positive Relationships

A metaphor for building positive relationships that we find particularly helpful is that of a piggy bank. Whenever you engage in strategies to build positive relationships, it is as if you are “making a deposit” in a child’s relationship piggy bank. Conversely, when adults make demands, nag, or criticize children, it is as if they are making a relationship withdrawal.



It may be helpful to reflect on the interactions you have with an individual child and think to yourself, “Am I making a deposit or a withdrawal?”

Things to try:

- Follow your child’s lead during play
- Have a conversation over snack
- Listen to a child’s ideas and stories and be an appreciative audience
- Provide praise and encouragement
- Post children’s work
- Acknowledge a child’s effort
- Give compliments liberally
- Read your child’s favorite book
- Play a game with your child
- Play outside with your child
- Give hugs, high fives, and thumbs up for accomplishing tasks
- Hold your child’s hand
- After a bad day, tell your child, “I’m sorry you had a bad day today – I know tomorrow is going to be better!”