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Helping with homework is a vital part of any parent's job. Helping kids develop discipline and a solid work ethic is even more important.

BY TERI CETTINA ILLUSTRATION BY JEN RENNINGER

WORK THIS WAY

When Travis Cohn Royce was in grade school, his mom Lisa was his homework buddy. He needed one: Travis' Portland, Oregon, school program required hours of work each night.

Lisa offered more than just help, though. "I even did some of his homework for him on occasion," she admits. "He had so much work he couldn't get to bed at night."

For most students, having a parent as a study helper is all too common. A study by the nonprofit Public Agenda group found that almost one-fourth of American parents have done part of their children's homework for them.

That can be a problem because take-home work is a child's first chance to develop a healthy work ethic, says Ruth Peters, psychologist and author of *Overcoming Underachieving*. "It teaches them how to do something they don't particularly want to do," she says. In the process, they gain a greater sense of responsibility. Here's how to make sure your kids—not their homework buddy—learn that valuable lesson.

▪ **GIVE YOUR CHILD A DEADLINE** Set a rule that homework should be done by 8 p.m.; unfinished work simply goes back to school the next day, says John Rosemond, psychologist and author of *Ending the Homework Hassle*. Deadlines focus kids and teach time management skills.

▪ **KNOW HOW MUCH TO HELP** Compare homework help to help given to kids with other tasks, such as dressing and eating, says Cathy Vatterott, professor of education at the University of Missouri. "Five- and six-year-olds may need help on some tasks while older kids are more self-sufficient," she

says. "Offer homework help the same way—give only as much as is appropriate for your child's age."

▪ **DON'T BE THE TEACHER** It's fine to proofread homework and point out mistakes, says Peters. If your child does the work and still gets it wrong, or is confused after you've explained a lesson, send back the homework with a note asking the teacher to review the topic again.

▪ **MARSHAL YOUR RESOURCES** If your child is struggling with a subject, consider outside help. If you can afford it, hire a tutor recommended by your school, pay an older student to be a homework buddy, or consult a learning center.

▪ **MOTIVATE RELUCTANT LEARNERS** Consider using a reward/take-away system. For grade-school kids, Peters suggests making chore charts that include homework as a task. Then give your child game chips or tokens for finishing chores, including homework. "The chips can be exchanged as allowance, TV time—whatever motivates them," she says. If you have to remind older children more than once to do their work, they lose a privilege, such as TV time.

▪ **STAY OUT OF THE SCIENCE FAIR** One of your child's classmates has a parent who is an engineer, and they're helping their child. Naturally you want to help yours—just know when to pull back. "If a parent essentially creates a project for a child, that's cheating," says Peters. "If your child doesn't understand why you'll only help so much, say, 'I know you're disappointed, but we don't cheat. This was your own work and that's worth a lot.'" ☺

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

According to National Education Association guidelines, the recommended homework load is 10 minutes of work per year of schooling through middle school. That means first graders would have 10 minutes of homework while sixth graders would have about 1 hour.