NO MORE STRESS

► Dinner Planned!
► Homework Done!
► Enjoy Your Weeknight!

Biggest Loser's

ALISON SWEENEY
ON HEALTHY & BALANCED PARENTING

Decode Your Preteen's Moods

9 WAYS TO EXPAND YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

BACK TO SCHOOL

GREAT:
STUDY TIPS:
SAFETY:

STARTUP

5 Moms
Dream It, Do it
KIDS ARE RUNNING WILD; DINNER'S BOILING OVER. YOU HAVE 20 minutes until karate class and hours of homework ahead of you. Welcome to a school-year weeknight. Don't worry; it doesn't always have to be this hard. Here are some tips for bringing peace and calm back to your week.
STRESS-FREE WEEKNIGHTS

Happier Homework

Make the nightly routine easier on your child—and you!

BY PEGGY J. NOONAN

The nightly homework routine can be a hassle that affects the whole family. But these simple tweaks will help you tame your Homework Monster.

My daughter won't sit still to finish her homework. How can I keep her focused?

"Structure the time into short segments" with frequent rewards and praise, suggests former teacher Peggy Semingson, assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Start with five-minute intervals for small or fidgety kids and gradually add minutes. Praise kids and give a reward after each completed interval or whenever they start to wiggle. Rewards can be anything that motivates your child—stickers, snacks, treats, breaks to stretch, even a brief play period. These baby steps will help kids build homework stamina.

Also, teach kids to organize their work. Show them how to make a homework to-do list and prioritize it, suggests Tom Reardon, a math teacher for more than 35 years. They'll see the work as more manageable in smaller chunks and learn "the satisfaction of accomplishing goals one at a time," he says.

You can also adapt your homework schedule to fit your child's "learning style," advises Harriet K. Weiss, director of Huntington Learning Center in Wilmington, Del. Some kids do better if they tackle homework right after school. Others do better later in the evening. Some need a quiet place to study; others like noise.

Quick Tip

Give kids some control, says Harriet K. Weiss of the Huntington Learning Center. Let them choose which assignment they want to do first but make completing all of their homework a "non-negotiable" part of the family routine.
### HELPFUL ONLINE MATH RESOURCES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CoolMath.com</td>
<td>Offers games and lessons and has a special section just for parents. coolmath.com.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan Academy</td>
<td>Boasts 4,000 videos profiling 400 skills, including a math library that covers concepts from arithmetic to calculus. khanacademy.org.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Purplemath Forums</td>
<td>Has algebra lessons in video and text formats with the goal of building students’ confidence (and yours, too!) purplemath.com.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Texas A&amp;M University Virtual Math Lab</td>
<td>Offers free, online tutorials for algebra lessons. wtamu.edu/academic/anns/mps/math/mathlab/.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WolframAlpha and Mathway</td>
<td>Allow you to calculate answers to check completed math homework. The site will help you feel like genius; just don’t reveal your sources to the kids. wolframalpha.com, mathway.com.</td>
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### A+ WAYS TO KEEP BOTH EYES ON THE PRIZE

- Try using locations as memory cues, suggests Caroline Richards, a Bloomington, Ind., high school teacher for 25 years. If your child is studying two similar but different subjects, such as French and Spanish, have study and homework for French done in one location and Spanish in another. Location-specific learning will make it easier for kids’ brains to shift gears between the two languages.

- Use novelty tools, suggests Michael Ray Smith, professor of communication studies at Campbell University in Buies Point, N.C. Invent ways to change homework lessons into games to make learning fun. Keep score and track performance online or on a calendar. Engage distant family members in the game via Skype.

- To improve kids’ retention of school-related facts, have them explain the “why” as well as the “what.” You may learn something new, too.
UP YOUR ‘NUMBER SENSE’

Math is easier if you have “number sense” or a feel for mathematical amounts, says St. Petersburg, Fla.-based educator Maureen Stearns, author of Multiply and Divide with Sticks and Steps. Develop this skill by playing simple estimating and counting games. Ask questions such as, “How many jellybeans do you think are in a handful? How long will it take to reach a destination? How much money is in the change jar?” Practice with variations to improve number sense and math confidence.

HELP: THE TEACHER MAKES INCORRECT CORRECTIONS ON HOMEWORK. SHOULD I SAY SOMETHING?

Yes, but not to your child, says Harriet Weiss of the Huntington Learning Center. Your child might see your criticism as an excuse to blame homework struggles on the teacher. Instead, discuss the problem with the teacher privately.

Math teacher Tom Reardon says it’s important to respect the teacher-parent relationship and to maintain open communication. He would pose the question this way: “You marked this answer incorrect but I couldn’t figure out why it was wrong. Could you explain it to me?”

But before you say anything, ask yourself how big of an issue this is. “If it’s a major conceptual error, the parent should bring it up. If it’s a small spelling error, some things can be let go,” UT professor Peggy Semingson says.

QUICK TIP

Teacher errors are an educator’s worst nightmare, says UT professor Peggy Semingson. “Definitely open that dialogue,” but keep the tone as neutral as possible, she says. The cause could be a number of things—carelessness, stress, overload—or it might be an assistant’s error.

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Quick Tip

Spin the homework mindset from a chore to a practice tool. Most kids understand the sports analogy. Tell them that, as athletes practice to stay good and get better at their sport, students must practice the lessons they learn in school.

HELP: HOMEWORK HOUR ALWAYS GOES LATE INTO THE NIGHT AT MY HOUSE. HOW CAN I START (AND STICK TO) A ROUTINE TO GET IT FINISHED EARLIER IN THE EVENING?

Team up. In families with more than one child, seat all the children together at the same time. Doing homework as a group can be motivating, professor Peggy Semingson says. Have a neighbor child or friend over for “homework club” and treat them like play-dates. An extra benefit? Kids can help each other with the material.

Also try peer tutoring with a classmate or a friend who knows the material. “Sometimes they can speak in kid language better than the parent can,” she says.

If needed, change the mindset. If homework is a dreaded chore now, try to spin their perspective. Show kids that homework is a practice tool that works like any other form of practice. The more you do it (and the better you do at it), the better you get.
A+ WAYS TO STICK TO THE ROUTINE

- "Schedule it on your calendar or phone," as you would any important appointment that must be kept, says Peggy Semingson of the University of Texas at Arlington. If doing all the work at once is the problem, "it's okay to break it up into chunks," she adds. "It doesn't have to be done in one sitting."

- "Treat homework as a very useful, necessary and positive thing," says former teacher Tom Reardon. Instead of assigning problems called "homework," he gave students "opportunities to learn."

HELP! MY DAUGHTER DOES HER HOMEWORK BUT FORGETS TO TURN IT IN. HOW CAN I HELP HER REMEMBER?

Give your child an accordion folder and a pack of sticky notes, suggests 21-year educator Barbara Dianis, author of Don't Count Me Out!, a guide for parents whose children have trouble in school.

Label each space in the folder with the names of the classes or subjects requiring homework. Teach your child to file homework assignments in the correct space as soon as they're completed. This ensures that homework is always where it's supposed to be and not lost somewhere like those matched socks that go missing in the dryer.

Next, show kids how to use the sticky notes to write reminder notes. As each homework assignment is finished and filed in the folder, have kids write themselves a reminder to take that homework to school. Put the sticky note on a notebook or backpack. Such systems help children develop good habits and turn their assignments in on time, Dianis says.

QUICK TIP

Have a system that you use to keep track of paying household bills? Show the kids how it works—and how important it is for mom to get her "homework" in on time, too.