

A Parent's Dilemma: Should I Help With Homework?

by

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A mother sits next to her son, a 7th grader, at the kitchen table and discusses social studies homework that is confusing to him, trying to get him on track so that he'll get a passing grade on the assignment. She wonders if she should be helping him at all and thinks to herself, isn't there some sort of rule that says parents shouldn't help their child with homework after the 6th grade? Across town, a father is reviewing a grammar homework assignment with his 3rd grade daughter who did poorly on a grammar test earlier in the week. And in another part of town, a mother is reviewing long-division homework problems with her 4th grade daughter in preparation for a math test tomorrow.

In each of these situations, the parent in some manner is helping their child with homework. Is this type of help appropriate, or is it a form of cheating? Should parents simply encourage their child to do the homework on their own because it teaches responsibility and self-discipline? What is the right thing for parents to do? You will find as many answers to these questions as there are parents, which only adds to the confusion, but there is a simple rule parents can follow.

It's definitely OK for parents to help their child with homework, regardless of the child's grade in school. If a 4th grader needs help with math, then by all means offer help. And if a 12th grader needs help in a particular subject, and you are able to help, then helping would be the appropriate thing to do. There is a difference, of course, between *helping* and *doing*. Helping with homework is OK; doing your child's homework is not.

We consider it to be an acceptable and an expected part of a teacher's role to help students who are having difficulty in a particular subject. And we find it equally acceptable to hire tutors when our child is struggling. In the home setting, parents basically operate as extensions of teachers whenever they help their child with schoolwork, and that, too, is an acceptable role. It enhances learning.

Getting help from parents often improves efficiency of learning. For example, if your child is having difficulty with math problems, he or she could waste hours trying to figure out how to do them, but it's senseless to waste all that time with trial-and-error learning when it might take only five or 10 minutes for the child to understand the problems by having a parent demonstrate how to do a few sample problems.

Moreover, helping with homework shows your child that you are interested in their learning, and it increases the chances for academic success, which in turn increases the likelihood of your child having a positive attitude toward school. When homework is a nightly struggle that results in the homework either being done incorrectly "just to get it done" or perhaps not completed at all, then there is the distinct risk that the child will develop a negative attitude toward school. School should be a positive experience for students, and helping with—not doing—homework is one step in that direction.

This information is provided for the parents and educators at St. Albert the Great School by Joseph D. Rocchio, Ph.D. Dr. Rocchio is a licensed psychologist and is available to parents, students, teachers, and staff at St. Albert the Great School to discuss issues related to learning, emotional well-being, self-esteem, and a host of other issues. He can be reached via email (drroccchio@yahoo.com) or by phone (440-237-1032, Ext. 42).