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Time to Set Homework Standards by Marilyn Suttle
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Homework can be such a hassle. After school, kids are busy writing book reports, memorizing spelling words, calculating math problems, and more often, avoiding writing book reports, memorizing spelling words, and calculating math problems. Do you find yourself arguing, nagging, threatening or bribing your kids to get their homework done? If homework has you down, don't despair. Here are 15 tips to help create a positive home environment that encourages kids to do their homework with less hassle and more harmony.

- Plan ahead. A little planning now can save a lot of frustration later. Sit down with your child and work out the details. When a child helps decide where, when, and how the homework will be handled, she is more likely to follow the rules she helps create.

- Have homework start at the same time each day. Whether it's shortly after school, later in the afternoon, or early evening, by consistently following a routine, your child will develop good habits.

- Location, Location, Location! Some children work best alone, away from distractions. Others need to feel the presence of family around them. Observe and talk to your child to find an optimal study area.

- Set your mood. Check your tone of voice and body language when interacting with your child about homework. Are you gentle and firm? Nagging? Approachable? Hysterical? Notice the results your mood generates. Positive moods are as contagious as negative moods.

- Make resources and supplies easily accessible. Place dictionary, paper, erasers, and other homework essentials together in one area for quick access. A child that has to break his chain of thought to look for supplies may have a harder time getting started again.

- Work toward independence. The goal is to have homework done independently of a parent. If your child needs constant supervision, consider reading a book, folding laundry, or balancing your checkbook instead of hovering over her. Show interest and provide help when needed, but avoid over involving yourself.

- Eliminate television from homework time. The distraction is too great.

- Research shows that certain types of music promote learning and productivity. Some children need a quiet environment, others enjoy and

make better use of their time with music in the background.

- Praise the child's efforts instead of his intelligence. The smartest person in the world won't accomplish much without putting in the effort. When efforts are praised, children learn that their actions lead them to success. In the early grades, bright kids often do well with little effort. If praise is focused on intelligence, it could mislead a child into believing that effort is a sign of weakness.

- Notice what your child is doing right. A child's energy flows in the direction of your focus. Noticing how sloppy a paper is written leads a child to see herself as sloppy. Noticing even one neat letter on the page leads a child to see herself as capable of writing neatly.

- Study in bursts. Sitting in front of the homework for one long stretch of time can lead to frustration and slower productivity. Allowing short breaks gives your child a chance to expend pent up energy, and work the wiggles out. Breaks should be short and not involve television.

- Let the child set up the schedule for long term projects. Kids need the opportunity to learn how to set priorities, schedule their time and complete tasks. Instead of telling them what to do, "You will devote 15 minutes a day to memorizing your spelling words," guide them to make decisions for themselves, "Would it work better for you to study all your spelling words each night, or memorize a few words each day?"

- Encourage your child to check his own work. Self evaluation is a useful tool for catching mistakes and improving quality.

- Should a parent check the child's homework for completion or check that all the problems have been done correctly? This depends on the teacher. Some teachers prefer that work is checked and corrected at home. Other teachers want corrections to be made at school only, in order to see what areas of teaching need to be reinforced. When in doubt, talk with the teacher.

- Do not tie your love and acceptance for a child to their homework performance. Each child is a worthwhile person regardless of their ability or inclination to do homework. Your unconditional love builds a healthy environment for a child to grow and learn in.

ACTION STEP: Select five tips above and write them on 3 x 5 cards to remind yourself to put them into place. Give yourself appreciation for following through.

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