



# REPORT<sub>to</sub> PARENTS

RP 32:2

## Effective and Appropriate Help With Homework

Parenting requires many judgment calls, including numerous decisions related to schoolwork and school projects. Principals and teachers are always stressing how important it is for parents to be involved, but how much is too much? For a start, put yourself in these situations:

- Your child's big science project is due tomorrow, but her after-school schedule has been so busy lately that she hasn't had time to finish it herself. Not wanting her to get a bad grade, you end up doing most of the work with her so she can turn it in on time.
- Your son's math homework packet is a big part of his grade, but he's having trouble with a few of the concepts. Is it OK to help him with some of the answers?
- Your daughter must write a poem for a school competition, but the verses she's come up with so far seem pretty bad. After thinking about her theme, you suggest different rhyming phrases that sound better. When the awards are announced, your daughter comes home excited and says, "We won!"

We all want our children to do well in school. But, sometimes, we might want it too much and end up giving them too much assistance. The problem is, while their grades might look stellar, their self-esteem can suffer. Children are smarter than we sometimes give them credit for. They know when they've earned a grade—and when they haven't. Instead of helping them succeed, too much parental involvement can lead them to failure.

So what's a concerned parent to do? How much help is reasonable? What kinds of suggestions or assistance are acceptable? And what do you do if they don't understand their homework, even after asking you for guidance?

**Don't do it for them.** Rule No. 1 is an easy one to remember: Don't ever do your children's homework or school projects for

them. The assignments were given to them for a reason—they need to learn the concepts, and they can't do that learning if you do their work.

**Guidance is great.** Help your children understand assignments by talking with them about the concepts. Let's say your child is having trouble with basic division. Dump out a stack of pennies or paper clips, count the total, and, together, divide them into groups of five, six, or seven. If your child has writer's block, instead of suggesting phrases to use, brainstorm together about ideas of things he or she could write about, and ask your child to list some of the things he or she could say. Help your children to learn how to think through the process.



**Be encouraging.** It can be frustrating to try to master new concepts and complete school projects. Give your children encouragement and understanding as they work things through.

**Expand their brains.** One great way parents can help their children with school projects is by asking them to go beyond their original ideas. If your son, for example, wants to do a shoebox diorama about dinosaurs, tell him that his original idea is good, but ask

what other ways he could try. Don't give him ideas, but help him use his own creativity. Ask him to think out a number of different ways he could approach the assignment. Let him follow his own path, and both you and his teacher will probably be very pleased with the result. Not only that, the work will be his own.

Finally, know when to call for help. If your child is consistently having trouble with a specific concept, even after you've helped explain it to him or her, it's time to let the teacher know. Chances are yours isn't the only child in the class who's confused. In addition to learning the schoolwork, your child will gain some very important knowledge: that it's smart to ask for help when you don't understand something.

