

Strategies To Help You And Your Child Survive Homework

Contributed by Linda Bress Silbert, Ph.D. and Alvin J. Silbert, Ed.D.

Is homework wreaking havoc in your home? If the answer is YES, then finding the real causes behind the homework problems, and taking steps to resolve them, will improve both school success and family harmony.

How do we know? Homework is the single biggest issue affecting home life, according to many of the parents who bring their children to us at STRONG Learning Centers®.

Here are the ten most common causes of homework problems, along with suggestions to help you resolve them.

1. THE HOMEWORK IS TOO DIFFICULT.

If the homework is continuously too difficult, with everything that entails, then a child will try to avoid it. Look into the cause. Begin by having a conversation with the teacher. If the problem is class-wide, hopefully the teacher will evaluate and adjust the nature of his or her homework assignments. If the problem is limited to your child, she may require additional help from the teacher after school, from you, from a sibling, from a teenager you hire, or from a tutor. If this fails to resolve the issue, then a reevaluation of the type of class, or course level, or teaching vs. learning style, or school may be in order.

On the other hand, the cause of the problem may be a disability: physical, learning and/or attentional. Your child may have difficulty in such areas as: hearing, seeing, reading, processing language, or writing, or she may have ADD or ADHD. If the problem is one of these, sometimes it is easy to resolve. For example, corrective glasses can easily resolve some seeing issues and behavioral therapy and/or possibly medication might help AD/HD, the newer term for the disorder. In many cases, consulting teachers, counselors, or specialists in the appropriate field, might be in order.

Note: If you suspect AD/HD, a valuable resource is CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder organization). For information on the learning disability (LD) issue in general, contact the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA).

2. THE HOMEWORK IS TOO CONFUSING.

When children chronically complain that assignments or directions are confusing, they are likely to become frustrated and/or anxious, eventually avoiding such assignments. Parents usually respond to these children by asking, "Weren't you listening?" Or "Just read the directions!" The children were listening or reading, but they may not have been able to process the information.

In this case, the cause may be reading comprehension and/or language processing problems. You may need to seek the help of teachers or a learning specialist to help your child learn strategies she can use to overcome or compensate for her disability. For example, she may need to put the words into pictures or graphic organizers. Children who become confused due to problems with language processing, do better when they can see things visually.

And, regardless of who is working with them, be sure they remain actively involved. Children (and adults too) are notorious for shaking their heads "yes" when asked "Do you understand?" even when they don't understand. Sometimes they are just "yessing" you and sometimes they think they understand. However, when you ask them to explain or discuss what you were just talking about, they realize that they really don't understand.

If neither of these areas are the cause of the problem, then you may need to investigate why your child continues to complain. If it turns out it is simply a ploy to get you to do the work with him, then you need to address the reason for that behavior. But wait — before you get annoyed, remember what it was like for you when you were a child. Homework isn't always fun, and sometimes it's nice to have a little company. Your child may simply want your company during homework time. Wow! How's that for the ultimate compliment?

3. THE HOMEWORK IS TOO LOW-QUALITY OR TOO BORING.

Sometimes homework assignments are low-quality boring busywork and children will avoid them simply because they don't want to do them. Unfortunately, one of life's little lessons that children need to learn is that sometimes we simply have to do boring things. If, however, every assignment appears to be dull, too easy, or too low-quality, you may need to talk to your child's teacher to determine the purpose of the assignments. Many teachers do not realize how some of the assignments are coming across to the children; chances are they will appreciate the feedback and adjust the work as appropriate.

4. THE CHILD IS DISORGANIZED.

He brings home the book and forgets the assignment. He brings home the assignment and forgets the book. Or he forgets the assignment and the book. Does this sound familiar? If so, it sounds like you've got yourself a disorganized child. The same is true for children who can't judge time or can't manage their time. They may have the best intentions to get the homework done, but somehow it gets lost in their time-maze.

It is so difficult for disorganized children to get their homework done that some of them would rather lie, insisting that there is no homework, than be criticized and punished. If poor organizational skills seem to be the issue, there are many books and articles that offer great strategies to help the disorganized child. See, for example, pp 123-127 in *Why Bad Grades Happen to Good Kids*.

5. THE HOMEWORK IS TOO INTRUSIVE.

It's a fact; homework cuts into playtime. So what's the problem? The problem is that in some cases homework time creeps up to the point of consuming the home lives of the children and sometimes that of the family as well. Besides the obvious down side, this may be harmful to children's intellectual development. Their brains are developing and they need to use all parts, and good quality play provides opportunities to use the "far corners" of the brain that might otherwise remain fallow. So, it turns out that children need to play. Surprisingly, brain research indicates that occasional boredom is good, too, as it forces children to think of things to do — that is, to use their brains to create.

So if homework time seems to have taken over your home, work out a schedule with your child so that he doesn't have to lie in order to play.

6. TOO MUCH PARENT INVOLVEMENT.

Some parents are overly involved in their child's homework. Here are the three most common types, all of whom tend to drive their children toward lying and deception. If any of these describe you, then work to change your behavior.

A. The "perfectionist parents." Perfectionists demand picture-perfect-homework. Their children hate to let them see their homework papers out of fear that they will judge the work unworthy, tear it up, and make them do it again. Besides being tedious and time demanding, in these extreme cases it is downright disrespectful of the child.

B. The "helicopter parents." These parents hover over their children, making sure that every "t" is crossed and every "i" is dotted. They think they're being helpful, but here's the problem: By not giving their children any breathing room, they are delivering the tacit message that their children are not capable of doing the work themselves. Not only does this harm their self-esteem, but it also denies them the opportunity of taking responsibility for their own work.

C. The "Pandora parents." The children of Pandora parents tend to deny the existence of any homework they don't understand because asking Mom or Dad even the simplest question is tantamount to opening Pandora's box. Their well-meaning parents can't contain their enthusiasm and turn what would ordinarily require a short answer into a long-winded treatise on some esoteric detail.

7. THE CHILD IS UNMOTIVATED.

Most children don't want to do homework. But while they may put up quite a fuss, somehow they manage to get the work done. If they don't, motivation may not be the problem; they may appear unmotivated, but this may be a convincing protective screen they've set up to mask a larger issue.

For example, many children appear unmotivated when in fact they avoid homework to protect their egos. How's that? Because these children erroneously equate failure with stupidity. Their logic is as follows: If they try and fail, it is a reflection of their intelligence. If they don't try and fail, it is not a reflection of their intelligence; it is due to lack of motivation or irresponsibility. These labels they can live with; the label "stupid," they can't!

8. TOO MUCH HOMEWORK.

Many kids simply cannot keep up with the projects, tests, quizzes, reading and other assignments they are given.

Here is a general guide for the typical amount of time children should be expected to spend on homework each school day. Grades K-2, about 10-20 minutes. Grades 3-6, about 30-60 minutes. Grades 7-12 will vary considerably, depending on subjects, projects due, tests, etc., but a reasonable average is about two hours, with more on weekends, as needed, for major projects and exams.

If your child spends considerably more than this on homework, look into the cause. Begin by having a conversation with the teacher. If the problem is class-wide, hopefully the teacher will make adjustments. If the problem is limited to your child because your child works slowly, or has other issues discussed in this section, talk to his teacher and see what can be done to modify his assignments.

9. IT'S TOO NOISY.

Many kids complain that they can't concentrate at home. Their siblings are running around, TVs and music systems are blaring, someone's on the phone, people are fighting, the dog is barking, the baby is crying. I don't know about you, but I need quiet to do work that requires thinking. Closed bedroom doors don't help much, as the muffled sounds of chaos always manage to get through.

Here is an idealistic solution. Even if it can't be carried out fully, at least it is something to aim for. As a family, consider designating a block of time as quiet time. Normal living continues, but more quietly than usual. Kids can use the time to do homework; parents can read, balance the checkbook, and write e-mails; those who have time to watch television can do so with headphones or the sound turned low. Sometimes quiet sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

10. THE CHILD IS TOO ALONE.

Some children are lonely when required to do homework in their rooms, and don't work efficiently in that setting. Some need continuous support and direction. That is, they need someone to help them stay on task or to provide a little assistance when they get stuck. If required to work alone in their rooms, these are the kids who emerge three hours later with little or nothing accomplished. Both groups of children tend to prefer doing homework on the kitchen table. This way they have people around them, either for support or company.

So, if homework causes chaos in your home, look into the reasons. Once you find them, and do what you need to resolve the problems, you'll be back on the road to school success and family harmony.

(Originally published at the Strong Learning website and reprinted with permission of the authors, Linda Bress Silbert, Ph.D. and Alvin J. Silbert, Ed.D.)

About The Author

Linda Bress Silbert, Ph.D. and Alvin J. Silbert, Ed.D. are the founders/directors of STRONG Learning Centers in New York. They've written over 40 books and developed 20 phonics games for children of all ages. To learn

more about the Silberts and the STRONG Method, visit their website <http://www.oureducationalbooks.com>.
To subscribe to their free e-zine, send a blank email to: subscribe@StrongLearning.com.

Acknowledgments www.articlecity.com