



Saint Joseph's
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

**A Homework Survival Guide for
Parents**

"To achieve excellence for the sake of the Gospel"



A Place to Work

Find the right place.

In some families, having a central location, where all children in the family do their homework works best. This may be the dining room or the kitchen table. In other families, each child has their own study place, usually at a desk in the bedroom. What works for you depends on your child. Some children do best under the watchful eye of a parent, in which case the dining room or kitchen may work best. Others need the quiet of their bedrooms to avoid distractions. Some children like to work with the radio on, while others perform less well with this kind of background noise. You may want to conduct “experiments” with your child to determine what setting works best under what circumstances. You will need to rate the quality of the homework completed, the time it took to finish, and the child’s reaction.

Gather Necessary Resources

Youngsters can waste a lot of time tracking down things like pencils, paper, rulers etc when beginning their homework. To avoid this, stock your child’s study area with these materials and any others they are likely to need, such as a dictionary, glue, coloured pencils etc. It may also be helpful to set up file folders for each subject your child is taking in school to keep track of necessary papers. A plastic container may be an ideal place to store study materials. The advantage of this is that these are portable – just in case you have a child whose preferred study style is to work in a different place each night!



You may want to have a second container, which your child can “dump” their school things in as soon as they get home from school. This will help avoid last minute frantic searches for permission slips, library books, messages from teachers etc.

Organising Homework/Setting Priorities

A homework session should begin by reviewing what the day’s tasks are. It is probably a good idea to draw up a list of tasks on a separate sheet of paper, so that you can then help your child prioritise any break down longer tasks into shorter ones.

Sometimes it is difficult for pupils to complete homework because of other obligations that they may have – sports events, doctors appointments, scout meetings, etc. You may find it helpful to put together a weekly calendar to keep track of these activities. Once a week, sit down with your child and fill out a weekly calendar together.



Getting Started

It is usually best to have the child begin with a task they consider “easy”. Some children may want to start with the hardest task first to get it over with, and this is acceptable unless the child has a very difficult time getting started and will dawdle or avoid the difficult tasks even though it was their choice to start with it.

For many youngsters, just getting started on homework seems like an insurmountable obstacle. We have several suggestions for handling this problem:

- Have the child specify exactly when they will begin the work and then reward them for getting to work within 5 minutes of the time they specified.
- Sit with them for the first 5 minutes to make sure they get off to a good start.
- Talk to your child about the work before they begin. This is particularly important for more open-ended tasks. Children often need to be primed or activated for their best efforts to come out.
- Walk through the first one or two problems or items to make sure they understand what they are supposed to do.
- Build in a short break relatively quickly, if getting started is a problem.

Getting through it

Make sure adequate breaks are built in. Many children have a great deal of difficulty working for long stretches of time on homework without a break. Better to plan for a two hour homework session with frequent breaks built in than try to cram homework into a one-hour non-stop session. Breaks should be between 5-10 minutes and they should be scheduled when work has been completed rather than after a set period of time, otherwise your child can daydream the time away and still get their break. Your child may arrange homework sessions between TV shows.



Thus their schedule on any given day might look like this:

4.30 pm	Maths
5.00 pm	TV Show
5.30 pm	Art
6.00 pm	Dinner
7.00 pm	TV Show
7.30 pm	Religious Education
8.00 pm	Science
9.00 pm	Listen to music

If they have not finished whatever task they were working on when the TV program comes on, they should miss the program or record it to watch at a later time.



Other suggestions for getting through homework

- Make a game out of work completion; have the child estimate how long it will take to complete a task. Set a kitchen timer where the child can't see how much time it was set for and challenge them to "beat the clock", or use a stopwatch to see how quickly that they can do a task or one maths question etc.
- IF a task takes longer than your child can sustain or if they get stuck, get them to switch to another piece of work rather than stop working altogether.



Long Term Assignments

These are often the hardest homework assignments for youngsters to complete.

Know what assignments are due when.

In addition to having a homework planner where daily homework is recorded, it is also advisable to have a *monthly calendar* on which long term assignments can be written down.

Break long term assignments into sub tasks

Sit down with your child and read over directions or discuss the nature of the long term assignment. Make out a list of the steps necessary to complete the work. If desired, this can be a fairly lengthy outline with notes attached providing more guidance about what is to be included for each step. For written reports, for instance, the steps might include taking notes, generating an outline, writing the introduction, the sections of the report and the summary, preparing a bibliography, drawing any necessary maps and charts, proofreading, preparing the final draft, and making a cover.

Draw up a timeline

Once the outline is developed, each sub task should then have due dates attached to it and should be written on the monthly calendar. Care should be taken to ensure adequate time is available for each step. A long report will require that more time be devoted to each step, particularly preparing the final draft and proofreading. If the long term assignment requires that your child use the library or gather information from outside sources, include these trips on the timeline, with dates attached. If materials need to be purchased, the time when this will happen should also be identified. In the beginning, your child will probably need a lot of help breaking down their assignments and developing a realistic timeline. As time goes on, they can manage increasing amount of responsibility for these. Time management is a skill and this is an early opportunity for your child to acquire these valuable skills.



Incentive Systems

For many youngsters, homework is a very difficult task that sometimes they perceive to be insurmountable. For these children all the organisation and planning in the world may not be enough to get them through the daily grind of homework. In this case, an incentive system may need to be put in place to make homework completion a more attractive task for them. If this is the right approach for your child, we recommend a system whereby your child can earn points for completing tasks or for demonstrating other appropriate behaviours



required for successful homework completion. The points can then be traded in for daily, weekly or long term rewards. You can produce fairly elaborate systems if your child is highly resistant to doing homework. When a problem is not considered to be so extreme, a more informal system may be all that is necessary. Children may also be taught to reward themselves as they complete tasks. They can also adjust the reward depending on the size or difficulty of the task. With some children, the use of natural or logical consequences along the way may be sufficient. Not being able to watch a favourite television programme because the homework was not done on time is a logical consequence. For some children, a falling grade is a natural consequence for failing to complete homework, and this alone will be enough to encourage them to work. However, it has been our experience that parents should not assume that fear of a falling grade alone will be sufficient to ensure that their child will do his/her homework.

Parents should resist the temptation to punish children for their failure to do homework. While it may make sense to cut down the amount of time they are allowed to play with their friends, a system in which rewards are built in for homework completion will likely be more effective than a system of negative consequence.

Most children who have problems doing homework are not happy about their situation or the fights they draw their parents into. Rather, it seems to take these children considerably more effort to get down to work and to sustain attention to homework than it does the average child. For this reason, it makes sense to reward for the extra effort it takes.



Parents Role – Help or Supervise

Many parents, particularly those of children who may be struggling at school, wrestle with the question of how much help they should give their children on homework. The following suggestions are offered:

It is a good idea for parents to discuss with their children the nature of the assignment, to make sure that they understand what they are supposed to do, and then to guide them as they do the first one or two items of an assignment. Parents should not have to remain by their children's side throughout the entire session. If your child seems to require this, then you should probably build in an incentive system for working independently to wean your child off relying on you for support or assistance.

Parents may want to review homework tasks to check for either neatness or accuracy. If the handwriting is illegible, it is acceptable to ask them to rewrite the work. If you find mistakes, you may want to say "I found three mistakes" or show them without giving them the correct answer.

Parents should keep in mind the overall purpose of homework: to give children independent practice with a skill they have already been taught. Parents should not have to teach the skills necessary for their children to complete their homework successfully. A good rule of thumb is that children should be able to get at least 70% of a homework task correct working on their own. If your child cannot achieve this level of success without a great deal of help from you, then you should contact the subject teacher or form tutor.

You may also want to talk to the teacher if your child appears to be spending an inordinate amount of time on homework even though he/she is successful at it. Ask the teacher how much time a child should be spending on homework, and if your child is working much more than that, ask for advice and support from that member of staff.



Summary of Advice and Support

- Choose together a suitable place to work.
- Think about possible distractions that will need to be avoided.
- Have all the necessary equipment to hand.
- Have a container where your child can “dump” their school things as soon as they get home from school.
- Planning and organisation is vital.
- Plan other activities like sports events into the evening along with their homework.
- Start with the easier tasks first.
- Build in breaks between tasks.
- Talk with your child about the homework.
- Break long term assignments into sub tasks.
- Draw up a timeline for longer pieces of homework.
- Try incentive systems for those children who are struggling with homework.
- Try to encourage your son/daughter to reward themselves as they complete tasks. This encourages independent learners.
- Not all pupils are motivated to complete homework by the fear of a falling grade.
- Try to resist punishing your son/daughter from failing to complete homework.
- Do not stand over your child throughout the whole homework period.
- Review their homework regularly. Ask your child to repeat it if the presentation is not up to standard.
- Ask children to correct spellings but allow them to find the correct spelling.
- A good diet will help your child's learning and concentration.
- Teachers are always pleased to talk to parents who wish to discuss homework – please ring if you are at all concerned.