"CHERISHED MOMENTS" COLUMN
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"CHERISHED MOMENTS"
The "Cherished Moments" column is written by Cathy L. Graham, County Extension Director with the Scotland County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. The following column will provide information to improve relationships between adults and children. "Cherished Moments" is dedicated to the many adults (parents, teachers, caregivers, volunteers, educators) who strive to grow and to the children who will surely benefit.

Children can't follow the path of truth and integrity unless your example lights the way.
--Unknown

WHOSE HOMEWORK IS THIS ANYWAY?
This Cherished Moments Column is a summary of material written by Sue Lockett John. It was the inaugural meeting of our women's book club. Our children were in second grade or beyond, and we were ready for intellectual challenge. So what did we talk about? Homework! Not the novel we stayed up late to finish, but the tearful scenes we'd left at home. Why, we wondered, is it such a struggle? What can we do? Whose homework is this, anyway?

The same issue surfaces at school functions, Little League games and other gathering points. As with all parenting challenges, it does help to swap strategies and realize that our families aren't the only ones struggling to incorporate homework into busy schedules and to figure out the "rules".

"The rules have changed since we were kids," says Lee Canter, Los Angeles parent and education consultant. Making sure kids do homework successfully depend upon setting a strong expectation at home as well as at school.

"It isn't easy, especially for parents who want only to make their children happy," says Canter. He believes it's more important to make children responsible and independent--two of homework's most valuable by-products.

Obviously, it's easier to instill good habits in a younger child than to break bad habits in an older one. But don't give up. These common complaints and suggestions apply to any age:

NO TIME
We make time for things that are important, whether it's soccer practice or tooth-brushing. Canter suggests teaching your child to keep a weekly calendar to schedule homework along with sports turnouts, music lessons, play and other activities. Homework time should be dedicated to academic pursuits, such as reading, whether or not there is an assignment due. This helps children start long-term projects before the last minute and discourages dashing out sloppy work.
If you can't be home during homework time, make sure your child and your childcare provider understand your expectations. You may need to check in by phone at first or impose consequences when you get home.

NO END
If homework drags on all night, make sure the study area is free from distractions, such as television or squabbling siblings.

Provide an incentive, such as: "When your homework is done, you can play (watch TV, go to the mall, etc.)." If incentives don't help, work with your child to figure out how long homework should take, then set a deadline and stick to it. Children learn by facing the consequences for late or incomplete work.

NO INTEREST
If your child gripes that homework is boring, she's probably right (life is full of boring, but important, tasks). Remember that homework's main value, especially in elementary school, is teaching responsibility and study habits. However, don't overlook ways to make learning fun: playing geography games, using fractions in a cookie recipe or playing quiz in the car.

Even if homework isn't fun, it should be developmentally appropriate. In "Hassle-Free Homework" Faith and Cecil Clark call the age 7 to 11 the "concrete logical" years, when children gain left-brain thinking skills; during this period, homework should stress learning, classifying and arranging facts. From 12 up, children are learning judgment and abstract thinking, and their homework should involve more reasoning and writing. If your child's homework seems developmentally off base, talk to the teacher.

NO ASSIGNMENTS
Homework policies vary from school to school, with most sending some work home from first grade on. One guideline multiplies grade level by 10 minutes: in other words about 20 minutes a night in second grade, and an hour by sixth grade. The workload increases through junior high, until a college-bound high schooler puts in two or more hours a night.

A teacher conference or a poor mid-term report may reveal your child has homework after all--It's just not coming home. A contract system that chalks up positive points works for some youngsters; others need to lose privileges (such as playtime, television or phone calls) if the work is not brought home.

NO CONCENTRATION
Be sure the study area is free from distractions, such as television and family conversations. However, depending on learning style, some youngsters work better with background music. Studies have shown that listening to classical music, particularly Mozart, can sharpen concentration.

Brief breaks for physical activity can help, as can moving to an easier subject.
NO CLUE
If your child is baffled, help her break the material into small, manageable parts. If the underlying concepts are unclear, have her talk to the teacher. Schedule a teacher conference if your child consistently doesn't "get it." Be sensitive to your child's learning style and to potential learning disabilities that might call for special tactics or tutoring.

NO INDEPENDENCE
If your child wants you to remain constantly at his desk, break away and make it clear that he must do homework on his own. Don't give any help until the child has tackled the problem at least twice. Then Faith and Cecil Clark suggest you "assist by questioning." For example, if your child asks, "Do I put a comma here?" say, "Look at your checklist" or "Do you remember the rule for clauses?"

Don't ever, ever do your child's homework. It cheats him out of valuable practice, teacher feedback and self-esteem.

NO COOPERATION
If you and your child are always at odds over homework, back off and put someone else on the front line. Try your spouse or daycare provider, or hire a tutor.

NO PROBLEM
Even if your child is getting good grades, watch out for bad habits-such as working with the television on, or leaving things to the last minute that could turn into problems later when the school work becomes more demanding. However, if your child is doing good work, don't bug him with rules made for other people's kids. You know your child and yourself better than anyone.

Source: Parenting Insights, Premiere Issue

Fun Things To Do With Your Children

- Help your child fill out a calendar with homework due dates and school events.
- Does your child know who to call in an emergency? Make a list for your refrigerator. Practice what to say.
- Have a contest – how many words can you make from the letters in OCTOBER?
- Have your child set a weekly goal and write it down. You can do this, too!

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