



Connect with Kids

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For the Classroom

Too Much Multi-Tasking

Video Overview

For teenagers, there's a lot going on after school: e-mails, texting, blogs, television, iPods and talking on the phone...all while they're trying to do their homework. The question is: does multi-tasking really work, or are teens fooling themselves?

Some kids apparently can't just sit down and focus on their homework at the exclusion of everything else.

"Well, I'm writing an essay about the American and French revolutions," says 15-year-old Luke Leavitt while sitting at his computer, "and I'm checking my e-mail and my Myspace [account] at the same time - and listening to my music."

And while some kids, like Luke, say they can handle all these things at once, experts disagree.

"Studies have shown that, when the children are watching TV while doing their homework, and they pick up their heads to watch a part of the program, they lose their focus on their homework and they start paying more attention to the television set," says Bonnie Cohen-Greenberg, director of BCG Learning Center.

And, she says, losing focus means kids won't remember what they've studied.

"Well, the problem is, if you're not really paying attention to something, you're not really learning it," she says. "So it's not going to stay in your long-term memory. Many times, children can describe what they see on TV while they're doing their homework much easier than they can describe the type of homework assignment they had - because the TV show is a lot more engaging to them."

In fact, many kids get so absorbed in e-mails, texting, the Internet, and video games, they end up procrastinating on their schoolwork.

That's often the case for 16-year-old Myles Grier.

"I think, well, I'm going to do it later, after I get off the computer," he admits, "but after I'm done with everything I'm so tired. So I end up going to sleep and I forget my homework. So I have to rush and do it in the morning, before class starts."

Experts say train teens early and hold the line, even if they argue - because schoolwork is their most important job.

“Realize that homework is a priority,” says Cohen-Greenberg, “and when they are doing their homework, to only do their homework. They can certainly have breaks. And when they have breaks, take a quick break - relax, do something fun - and then get right back to it.”

Homework Wars

What should you do if your child hates homework and doesn't complete assignments on time or at all? The U.S. Department of Education has some advice. The department's National Parent Information Network (NPIN) suggests that parents call someone at school when homework problems arise. Everyone needs to work together – the school, teachers, parents and the student – to solve the problems. If your child refuses to do assignments, call his or her teacher. If you and your child can't understand the homework instructions, call the teacher. The teacher may also be able to help you get your child organized to do the homework.

The NPIN says different homework problems require different solutions:

- Does your child have a hard time finishing assignments on time? Maybe he or she has poor study skills and needs help getting organized.
- Is the homework too difficult? Maybe your child has fallen behind and needs special help from a teacher or tutor.
- Is your child bored with the homework? Maybe it's too easy and your child needs extra assignments that give more challenge.

The NPIN suggests asking your child these questions to combat any problems about homework that may arise:

- What's your assignment today?
- Is the assignment clear? (If not, suggest calling the school's homework hotline or a classmate.)
- Do you need special resources (a trip to the library or access to a computer)?
- Do you need special supplies (graph paper, poster board, etc.)?
- Have you started today's assignment? Have you completed it?
- Is it a long-term assignment (a term paper or science project)?
- For a major project, would it be helpful to write out the steps or make a schedule?
- Would a practice test be useful?

What Parents Can Do

What kind of “homework help” should parents give their children? The Chicago Public Schools offers this advice:

- **Encouragement:** Give your child praise for efforts and for completing assignments.
- **Availability:** Encourage your child to do the work independently, but be available for assistance.
- **Scheduling:** Establish a set time to do homework each day. You may want to use a calendar to keep track of assignments and due dates.
- **Space:** Provide a space for homework, stocked with the necessary supplies, such as pencils, pens, paper, dictionaries, a computer and other reference materials.
- **Discipline:** Help your child focus on homework by removing distractions, such as television, radio, telephone and interruptions from siblings and friends.
- **Modeling:** Consider doing some of your work, such as paying bills or writing letters, during your child's homework time.

- **Support:** Talk to your child about difficulties with homework. Be willing to talk to your child's teacher to resolve problems in a positive manner.
- **Involvement:** Familiarize yourself with the teacher's homework policy. Make sure that you and your child understand the teacher's expectations. At the beginning of the year, you may want to ask your child's teacher these questions – What kinds of assignments will you give? How often do you give homework? How much time are the students expected to spend on them? What type of involvement do you expect from parents? activities, or if he or she is having problems sleeping or eating, parents should consider whether the child is over-scheduled.