

Homework Helper

A step-by-step guide
for less tears and more
independence

the
childhood
collective

Homework Doesn't Need to be a Struggle

Do you dread homework as your child? We feel you, mama. The last thing most kids and parents want to do at the end of a long work day is, well, more work.

Learning to follow instructions and stay on task are important skills your elementary-aged child can learn with this **Homework Helper**. At first, your support will be critical for homework completion. As your child is successful, your support will fade. Your child can be independent with homework if you lay the foundation with appropriate expectations.

You will be asking your child to complete short, manageable time chunks of homework with brief brain breaks in between. When your child successfully stays on task and completes work, your child can earn points that are to be “cashed in” at the end of the homework session for rewards.



Follow us and share your experience with the **#homeworkhelper** on social media.

Before You Begin the Homework Helper

1. Set your child up for success by creating a homework station or space. A quiet space, free from distraction (such as unneeded screens), is essential for homework success. Ensure needed supplies (pencils, ruler, calculator) are within reach so your child is not relying on your support for homework. We also recommend the use of a visual timer (we are fans of the "Time Timer").
2. Gather your child's homework assignments. Homework should be at or below grade level. The purpose of the **Homework Helper** is to teach your child to follow instructions and stay on task, so assignments should be relatively easy. Assignments can increase in length and difficulty as your child becomes successful.
3. Preview your child's homework before giving the assignments. Know the content of the reading materials or the answers to the problems given. This step is to ensure you are able to quickly assess your child's accuracy and understanding.
4. Introduce your child to the **Homework Helper** on a day when no actual homework needs to be completed and time restraints are low. Practice the **Homework Helper** (detailed on next page) with easy tasks so your child understands the rules before actual use with real homework assignments.



10 Steps to Implementing the Homework Helper

1. Divide your child's homework into 3-5 manageable-length time chunks. These chunks may vary from about 5 to 15 minutes, depending on your child's age and attention span.

- Why chunk work? Adults and children work better when we set reasonable goals of productivity. We are actually more productive when we take regular breaks than we are if we try to "power through" a longer task.
- This is especially true for children with ADHD and other learning challenges who have a hard time paying attention for extended periods of time.

2. Remind your child of the Homework Helper rules, agree upon the reward to be earned, and preview homework task.

- Why do we talk about the reward each session? Reinforcement systems are only as good as the reward is motivating to your child. If your child is working for something no longer of interest, he/she will be less likely to meet his/her goals.
- Complicated tasks can be overwhelming. By reviewing the task(s) with your child, you can increase your child's willingness to get started. Some ideas include: talking about or drawing how the final product should look, or creating a checklist of tasks involved for him/her to check off as he/she works.

3. Review the two main behavioral expectations:

- Stay on-task - example of on-task behavior: pencil in hand, looking at paper, reading book aloud; non-example of on-task behavior: talking with sibling, gazing around the room, looking at the television.
- Complete accurate work - set a goal for accuracy for your child, whether it be percent correct, number of accurate answers, or correct responses to check for understanding.

4. Start the timer for the first chunk. Occasionally "peek and praise".

- All children learning a new skill, especially children with ADHD or learning challenges, need frequent feedback on their performance. Catch them when they are doing well to encourage them to keep it up!

10 Steps to Implementing the Homework Helper

5. At the end of the timer, your child can earn up to 2 points (one point for each behavioral expectation met).

- When reviewing points earned with your child, provide matter-of-fact feedback when a point is not earned (example: "You did not earn your point for staying on-task because you and your sister were talking."). Avoid your own emotional response and provide encouragement that he/she can try again during the next work chunk (example: "I bet you'll get it next time!").
- Show excitement and praise your child for each behavior expectation that is met (example: "You did a great job keeping a calm body even though some of those problems were difficult – keep it up!").

6. If at least 1 point is earned, provide break of choice (2–5 minutes) using a timer.

- Given that the break period is quite brief, not all activities are good break options (such as watching a TV show). Good break ideas include: using the bathroom, grabbing a snack, working on a puzzle, or getting outside. Make sure your child knows what break options are available to him/her before implementing the **Homework Helper**.

7. If no points are earned, your child is provided a restricted break (for example, only bathroom use or water break) using a timer.

8. Return from break. Award a point for prompt return from break.

9. Repeat steps 4–8 for subsequent homework chunks, until work is complete.

10. Once homework is completed, add points to "cash in" for rewards.

- We recommend that your child earns a reward if he/she achieves 70–80% of the total points possible. We want your child to experience success immediately. You can make the goal more challenging as your child demonstrated improved behavior. **The goal should never be perfection every time.**
- More immediate rewards are the best teachers – try to encourage your child to select from a rewards list of things that can be "cashed in" immediately (for example, one-on-one play time with mom/dad rather than a special trip to the aquarium over the weekend).

Modifying the Homework Helper

Is something not going quite right, or you're not sure how to customize the Homework Helper for your child? Here are some ideas:

- **Modify the length of work chunks.** Perhaps the length of the chunks is too long for your child. Try decreasing the length and gradually building back up as your child is successful.
- **Modify the number of work chunks.** Your child may do better with more, shorter chunks or less, longer chunks. Try modifying the number your child has to complete to meet his/her individual needs.
- **Ask your child's teacher about shortening assignments.** Some work is better than no work. In some cases, your child may have mastered a certain concept within the first few problems. Having your child repeatedly do a task that he/she has already mastered can be frustrating. Talk with your child's teacher about reducing the number of problems focused on the same concept if he/she demonstrates mastery. For example, do only the odd numbered problems or only the front side of the worksheet.
- **Modify the length of breaks or break-approved activities.** If your child is struggling to return from break promptly, or doesn't seem prepared to reengage after break, try modifying the length of the break provided or the activities that are break-approved.
- **Modify the frequency of feedback.** Try "peek and praise" more often if your child is struggling to stay on task or meet other behavioral goals.
- **Modify the available rewards.** If your child seems to lose interest in the Homework Helper, try refreshing his/her list of rewards.
- **Modify the time of day your child completes homework.**
- **Modify the location your child completes homework.**
- **Modify the type or number of behavior expectations you utilize.** Maybe your child has no problem with accuracy, but struggles to complete neat work or stay calm? You can modify the behavior expectations for which your child is receiving feedback and points to meet his/her current needs.
- **Modify the level of support you provide before starting the timer.** If your child is struggling with homework content, they may need more support from you to "set the stage" before the timer is set and independent work is expected. Be sure to review homework instructions with your child. Try drawing (such as on a white board) how the finished task should look.

Homework Helper Checklist

- ☐ Seat your child at his/her designated homework station.
- ☐ Preview your child's homework and chunk the homework into 5- to 15-minute chunks.
- ☐ Review Homework Helper rules with your child, choose the reward to be earned, and preview the homework task.
- ☐ Review 2 behavior expectations (stay on-task, complete work accurately).
- ☐ Start timer and "peek and praise".
- ☐ When timer ends, award points for each behavior expectation that was met.
- ☐ If at least one point is awarded, a break is earned from approved break options.
- ☐ If no points were earned, a restricted break is provided (bathroom use, water).
- ☐ Award a point when your child returns from break promptly.
- ☐ Repeat homework chunks until all homework is completed.
- ☐ Allow your child to "cash in" his/her points for rewards.
- ☐ Celebrate progress toward homework independence!

Homework Helper Tracker

My behavior goals:

1. _____

2. _____

My break options:

Earned break: _____

Restricted break: _____

		Work Chunk 1	Break Point	Work Chunk 2	Break Point	Work Chunk 3	Break Point	Work Chunk 4	Total Points
Monday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Tuesday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Wednesday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Thursday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Friday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Saturday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Sunday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								

My behavior goals:

1. Stay on-task
2. Complete accurate work

My break options:

Earned break: LEGO's, jump on trampoline, or draw

Restricted break: Use bathroom or get a drink

		Work Chunk 1	Break Point	Work Chunk 2	Break Point	Work Chunk 3	Break Point	Work Chunk 4	Total Points
Monday	Goal #1			Stayed on-task, but did not work accurately or return from break promptly.					
	Goal #2								
Tuesday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Wednesday	Goal #1	✓	✓	✓		✓			6
	Goal #2	✓				✓			
Thursday	Goal #1	Met both behavior goals and returned from break promptly.				Met both behavior goals and completed work, so 4th chunk was not needed.			
	Goal #2								
Friday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Saturday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								
Sunday	Goal #1								
	Goal #2								