

JACK'S HOMEWORK WARS

A Boney Bum Book written by Jack Canon

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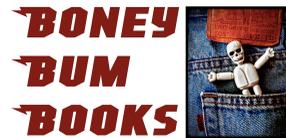
Jack, the boy with a boney bum

Jack's homework wars

The dangerous life of teenage boys

Books by Susie Canon

Mum. You're number one



CHAPTER ONE

BLOODY MATHS HOMEWORK

“Bloody maths homework. I hate it!” Jack exclaimed as he sat down to tackle the work he hadn’t completed in Mr. Jackson’s maths lesson that afternoon.

Jack remembered doing a few minutes of homework each night at primary school, but this high school regime was ridiculous. He didn’t care for it one little bit.

“Why do we need homework? I don’t understand. Heck. Why do we need homework?” Jack sighed.

“Home work is something our teachers try to explode out brains with – at home – because they haven’t exploded our brains enough at school.”

“I hate it.”

"You know what?" Jack said to himself, "Have you ever thought about it? They wouldn't have school in heaven, and no homework."

"I just got a brilliant idea. I'll just go kill myself."

"I'm a 14 year old, dealing with crap, trying to enjoy my TV or learn REAL social studies on my phone, computer, or iPod, and BLAM!! This giant frigging stack of homework falls in!!! I want to die so much every day."

"Hey Jack, are you doing your homework?" Jack's mum yelled from the kitchen.

"Trying to." Jack mumbled under his breath.

Jack and his mum had many battles over his resistance to get his homework done once he got home from school. Some nights it became a yelling match. On a few occasions both had been reduced to tears after screaming at each other.

Jack's mum had ambitions for Jack. He was bright but lazy. It seemed to Jack's mum that he was throwing away a golden opportunity to do better than his parents by putting in a bit of effort while still at school.

Jack's mum stood at the door to Jack's bedroom and smiled at her frustrated son.

“Is it really that bad dear?”

“It’s nearly impossible Mum,” Jack replied with a heave of his shoulders.

“Is there anything I can do to help Jack?” Jack’s mum offered.

“You could write a note giving some lame reason why I shouldn’t have to do homework, like I am allergic to it or that the dog ate it or something.” Jack said.

“Do you need a new desk or light or anything like that Jack?” Jack’s mum asked.

“I don’t think anything will help Mum. It’s all so hopeless. I can’t see me getting all this work done every night of the school week for six years of high school.”
exclaimed Jack.

“How did you and Dad ever get through high school?” Jack added.

Jack’s mum was too embarrassed to say that she and Jack’s dad had been just as lazy as Jack and had struggled through on a minimum of homework. Jack’s dad had been given detentions and got the strap but he never did manage to get his homework done. Neither wanted to admit to Jack that they were just like him. They hoped their encouragement would be the difference between the two generations. Both pairs of Jack’s grandparents had not really cared how their kids

managed their time once home from school. As long as they kept their noses clean and kept out of trouble they could do as they pleased.

CHAPTER TWO

MR JACKSON'S CLASS

"Settle down. Settle down you lot," Jack's maths teacher hollered for the class to settle down.

Mr. Jackson had been allocated a reluctant year 9 all boys maths class at the beginning of the year. He had taught many of the boys previously and despaired at trying to get this lot over the line with passes by year's end.

"Bloody vegie maths," he thought. "Why can't these kids understand the most basic idea - that if you put in some effort the rewards will come."

He told the boys to get out their homework. There was very little movement and many eyes rolled and sighs rolled across the room.

"Have any of you fools even attempted it?" Mr. Jackson asked in despair.

Many boys said it was just too hard. The common rejoinder was that they had tried but couldn't make any sense of it.

"Jack, did you do your homework last night?" Mr. Jackson directed his question straight to Jack?"

"No, sir, I don't like it."

"I don't believe in it. I believe in research for higher education, but for high school kids, I think they should be doing all their work during school hours. I've always believed this and I don't think school should intrude on a kid's after-school life.

"Now, as they get older...high school...some research projects might need extra time to be completed outside of school. But until a person is in VOLUNTARY education I think their time outside of school should be largely spent following their hobbies and personal interests.

Abolish homework!!!!" Jack summarized on behalf of many of the boys in

form 9F.

Jack thought quietly to himself, "The one thing I can't stand is maths. When Mr. Jackson starts giving his long lectures on how numbers will unlock your future and blah, I'm thinking 'Now, what's a good way to get out of this hell hole, there's always jumping off the third story roof.'"

Jack's mum didn't usually bother going to parent teacher interviews. With Jack's poor attitude to maths in particular and any homework in general she decided that turning up and having a chat to Mr. Jackson might help give her some ideas about Jack's reluctance to even attempt homework seriously.

"This feels weird," thought Jack's mum as she tried to find her way to Mr. Jackson's classroom on the night of the parent teacher interviews. Being back in a school made her feel a bit queasy and she was also nervous - "It feels like being a kid in trouble again, I even feel foolish," she thought.

"Hello Mrs. Canon. Thank you for coming in to chat about Jack's maths," Mr. Jackson said as he offered Jack's mum a chair across from his own at the front of his classroom.

"Do you have any particular questions to ask me about Jack and mathematics?" he asked curiously.

"I am very concerned by Jack's approach to homework in particular," Jack's mum stated.

"He used to do well in most subjects, but this year in year 9 he is running into motivation problems. He also has lost his positive attitude to school life," she added.

"That's pretty common in year 9 boys," Mr. Jackson responded.

"It's not the easiest year level to try to teach," he added.

"I am not really sure about how to help Jack with his homework; how to help him approach it in a positive way and how to set up a study space for him at home for instance," Jack's mum stated.

"It seems much harder than it was for Jack's older sister Susie. We never had these issues with her," She added.

"Well, there are a few basics I can talk about with you. It seems to me that a lot of parents are confused and uncertain about managing their sons while doing homework. Let's see how you respond to these ideas," he added.

“For a start, where and when does Jack attempt to do his homework?” he asked Jack’s mum.

“When he was little he would stay with me at the kitchen table and I was able to help and encourage him while I prepared dinner.”

“But now he won’t come out of his bedroom. He always closes the door and I am sure he listens to music while he says he is doing his homework.”

“He has a desk which is covered in his junk. **I don’t how he finds room to open his books in there.**”

“When he gets home from school he has some chores to do and likes to play rough and tumble with our two dogs. By the time he has a chance to get on with homework it is after dinner and he has to fight with his desires to watch his favourite TV shows.”

“It is usually late and nearly bedtime before I even think to check whether he has homework” Jack’s mum added.

“It seems he has too many distractions for a start,” said Mr. Jackson.

"You can be assured that he has homework every night of the school week. The rule of thumb we try to use is 10 minutes of homework times the year level that a student is in. In Jack's case that would be 90 minutes or an hour and a half Monday to Thursday." Mr. Jackson continued.

"That seems like an awful amount of homework to do. Jack does only a fraction of that," Jack's mum sighed.

"Personal experience here of my own is that when maths starts to stress kids out, it is usually because they have not mastered something yet and the class is moving on without them being ready to move on. And then things only get worse because in maths everything builds on what you have already supposedly mastered. I would guess that when you ask him what he doesn't understand, though, his answer will be that he doesn't know--and he truly doesn't. So don't get mad and frustrated (been there, done that myself, though!), calmly say well, we need to find out where you stopped understanding and then work forward from there.

"It really helps kids to learn how to talk to a teacher, learn that they aren't in trouble for not understanding, and to explain how maths builds and it will only get worse if they can't figure out what they aren't understanding." Mr. Jackson stated sympathetically.

"Mrs. Canon, I'll chat with our year level coordinator and see if we have a parent's guide to homework that I can give you." Mr. Jackson concluded.

In the meantime, just try saying positive things to Jack about the few short years of school that he has left and the difference it can make to his future choices if he does well.

CHAPTER THREE

MUM'S HAVE THEIR SAY

Jack dropped the note on the kitchen table.

"There, are you satisfied now Mum. Just stirring up trouble again, if you ask me," uttered Jack in dismay.

"The principal has called a public meeting to discuss the homework issue at our school. If you hadn't got so involved in that parent teacher interview with Mr. Jackson this might not have become such a big deal. I just know there is a lot more homework ahead of me now." Jack said in despair.

Mr. Acheface, the school principal addressed the meeting of mostly mums. He stated that there existed a major backlash amongst boys in particular on the issue of homework. **He invited parents to share their thoughts.**

Mrs. Jensen jumped to her feet and said, “I have two sons: a 6th- and a 9th-grader. Both boys are rambunctious and both sometimes find focusing a challenge. I am a female and the eldest of two girls. Now I am no saint, but I don’t recall needing to have a parent hover over me to do my homework or feel a sporadic need to wallop my sister on the back for no apparent reason. Yet this is my lot in life – my job in dealing with it is just one big growth opportunity.”

“Battle-weary from last year’s homework wars, I have resolved to try something different this school year. I am currently working out a homework schedule for both kids – a schedule that is based on expectations, rewards, and consequences.”

“I hope that our new homework schedule will increase my sons’ ability to focus on the emotional and tangible rewards of scholastic achievement as opposed to say ... playing “whomp-my-brother-on-the-back-and-run-to-avoid-doing-homework” game.”

Mr. Trumble was up next. He cleared his throat and uttered, **“Try the “10 Minute” Rule** – 10 minutes of homework per grade level per night. 5th graders do 50 minutes, 9th graders do 90 minutes, etc. “Mandatory Homework Time” – an uninterrupted block of time during which homework is to be done. It should start

and stop at the same time each day, Monday through Thursday. They should do another block of time between Friday and Sunday, with the condition that **SOME TIME MUST BE SPENT ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON** to prepare for return to school on Monday.”

These first two parents got the others warmed up. Before long there was a sea of hands from parents requesting to be the next speaker.

Mrs. Carmichael, a single mum said, “Yes, the homework wars can be wearying. I, too, do not remember my parents overseeing any of my schoolwork. I simply wouldn't even dream of not getting it done to the absolute best of my ability. Now, **my son is quite bright, yet needs to be tied down to get his reading done.** This year, 7th grade, we are finally starting to see him be more responsible about remembering to bring the correct books and papers home. I don't know if that's just a function of maturity, or my ex-husband threatening to show up before dismissal every day to stand with him at his locker to make sure he packs everything he needs! But over the years, I was always driving him back to school to get something he forgot, having worksheets faxed to us from schoolmates, etc. I now recognize the error of those ways. Since Mummy would rescue him every time, he wasn't learning self-reliance. I urge parents to not follow that path.”

Other parents vented or shared depending on what success that had experienced with their children doing homework.

“I’ve found that the biggest challenge in our house is finding a consistent time to do homework, especially when you add in afterschool activities. I’m now trying to get my son to do his homework when he gets home, right after he has a snack and unwinds a little.” voiced another frustrated mum.

“We have **done the “home, snack, homework” plan** and it works beautifully for my younger son who is now in 6th grade but I have mixed results with my older son (with ADD) whose biggest challenge is remembering that he even HAS homework and then having the correct material he needs to complete it... and the turning in of the finished work the next day. Ugh” exclaimed a hassled mother at the back of the school auditorium.

“I too struggle with the homework wars with a 13 year old boy. He can turn a maths sheet that should take 15 minutes into 5 hours of homework. He simply sits there and looks at it, refusing to write anything on it or read it. He does the same with some of his work at school as well.” Came another response.

“I went into culture shock when my son (now 11) entered Kindergarten. What is it

with the views of homework, discipline and expectations with the kids now-a-days? I was shocked to find my son didn't care about any of it, let alone that he wasn't terrified of not doing it perfectly and turning it in on time neat as a pin with the fear of nothing less than eternal damnation if he didn't!" cried a mother.

"My kids do have a set time of day to do homework – typically after dinner (we eat early) and a bath – but we are rethinking that schedule. I am fortunate that my kids aren't involved in after-school activities YET, but I can imagine that is right around the corner. Thus, I will have to choreograph those activities with homework time – ooh, I can hardly wait!"

" You are **absolutely right about 3 hours of homework vs. the child TAKING 3 hours to complete the homework.** While I do think that the amount of homework that my 12 year-old has DOES seem a bit excessive, I admit that his frequent digression and stalling tactics prolong the entire activity."

"My 15 year-old is also well-behaved in other areas. He just tends to drift and digress to his own amusement, thereby avoiding completion of his homework. He will debate like he's a trial lawyer over trivial issues, when all that energy could be put to much better use in just completing the assignment! ugh There are no easy answers, I'm afraid. (sigh) We have tried consequences and rewards – sometimes

they help, sometimes they don't."

"Believe it or not, my son is in 10th grade. I'm still checking daily for him and I'm tired. **My 8 yr old daughter does better than he does.**"

"The homework planner seems to work for my 4th grader, but only if I follow through with it. His teacher was the first one to use this approach (a daily homework assignment planner). Granted, it does not specify WHEN the homework is due or HOW LONG it should take to get the homework done, but it does specify his assignments for each area of study (social studies, maths, etc.). I admit that the planner DOES HELP in making sure that he comes home with whatever assignments that he is supposed to do that night, but it also takes vigilance on my part: I go through the planner with him when I pick him up from school (BEFORE we leave) in order to make sure he has what he needs for each assignment (eg., books, reading material, etc.). He frequently "forgets" to bring home his vocabulary book or maths book or ... Well, you get the picture. Going over each assignment with him – and what is required for each assignment! – really helps cut down on all of his "accidentally" missing homework."

"It is a monumental challenge for us, as parents, to instill in our children some

sense of responsibility for oneself. I'm not sure exactly when or how that happens, to be honest. I've tried letting him get low marks on his homework because he didn't do it (i.e., natural consequences), and I didn't check that he brought it home (purposely). But kids these days don't seem to care much, and I don't know why ..." wept a mother in despair.

"You shouldn't argue or fight or (God forbid) beg or plead with your child to comply with your wishes. The choice is theirs. Just make sure that the positive consequences are something he really wants and the negative consequences are something he really does NOT like. Remember this, "We don't change until the pain of change becomes less than the pain of not changing," a smug dad added to the conversation.

"My son's teacher told us if he would put as much energy into DOING his homework as he does avoiding homework then he would be no less than an A/B student!" added a frustrated mother.

"I have an 12-yr old boy with LOTS of homework! I tried expecting the homework be done first thing after school, but found it was too much to ask for my son. Personally I feel children (especially boys) need that physical play/off time after

school to let off steam. What has been working for us this year is that he plays until 5:00pm, then begins homework when I begin preparing dinner. He is focused on homework at the kitchen table at the same time I'm focused on dinner – he seems to feel encouraged when we are both focused but yet I'm there and he can ask me for help when needed. I briefly help, then I'm back at my task of dinner preparation and he's back at his work. Very important: His **play time between school and homework (5:00pm) DOES NOT include what we call “screens”** (TV, computer). If (and only if) he completes his homework by dinner time (usually 6–6:30ish) he **EARNs** an hour of TV time **AFTER** dinner (usually around 7-8pm). This has given him the incentive to complete his homework without dragging it out to extraordinary painfully long hours, and lets us enjoy dinners together without angst of homework hanging over us. (If he neglects to complete his homework before dinner and I feel it's because he's wasted time—there is no TV and he has to report to his teacher that he didn't finish. This is something he hates to have to do,)” a satisfied mother added.

“I have instituted something new since last week...Breaking my son's homework up & using the timer on my microwave...I set the timer for 15 minutes for him to do his packet page, when the timer's done he stops whether he's done or not, then I re-set the timer for 15 minutes for him to do his daily notebook homework. When the

timer goes off again he stops and I re-set the timer for 30 minutes & I quiz him on his spelling words...if he has time left over he can complete whatever work he didn't finish for the day."

"I agree with you that kids (yes, especially boys) need some time after school to physically decompress (i.e., playtime). That is indeed important. And I admire the routine you initiated of your son doing homework while you prepare dinner – what a creative and effective use of your time! I, too, find that the no "screen time" (love the phrase!) is significant. I don't exactly know what realm my son goes into when he's engrossed in one of those video games, but I think he's left part of his brain there when it comes to homework time."

"Your idea of using a timer intrigues me. My son is very competitive – it would be interesting to see what he could do if I timed his homework! 15 minute segments seem reasonable."

"My son is 14, in 8th grade, and has been diagnosed with ADHD. Last night he told me he had social studies homework to do and worked on that. Today his teacher called me to tell me that he's had the packet for almost 2 weeks now and this is to help him prepare for the quarterly exam, which is on this coming Monday. She also told me he spends class time sleeping or doing nothing."

“My son makes his homework last 3-6 hours because he is constantly distracted and busy complaining about getting the work done (he really would be a great lawyer!).”

“I’ve asked for them (I have a 12 year old, too – no ADHD) to start homework right away -doesn’t happen. I have told them to relax for 30 minutes with a snack then start homework - doesn’t happen. I have to be there constantly checking to make sure they – especially 14 year old – is working. And, like someone else said, he often does not turn in what he’s completed at home – think that’s the ADHD and related issues. HELP!!!!”

“I’ve taken the power cord to his Xbox & cable box in his room. He will move to another room to watch tv. Am I to strip the entire house of electronics each morning and replace each night? **How ridiculous!** I don’t know what to do to motivate him. I know that I’m not always consistent, but sometimes I’m just so tired I can’t stand it – that’s when it slides. Also, I can’t believe he has the energy to fight for so long... years it seems like. I, on the other hand, don’t have that kind of stamina. Seems like the older he gets, the worse it is.”

“I don’t know exactly WHAT to attribute this homework avoidance syndrome to,

honestly. (shrug) I'm right there with you, slugging it out, night after night, in the homework trenches. ”

“My son's teachers pile on more homework.

The result is that my son's life – and by extension our family life – is a constant, stress-laden stream of homework and tests and projects. It overshadows everything we do, always hanging over our head. It affects our weekends, our meals, our vacations, our work time, our playtime, our pocketbooks.

And to what end? Maybe I'm missing something, but when did schools determine that the best place for kids to learn maths, science and English is at their own kitchen table?”

“Amy and I knew there was a problem several weeks ago when our son brought home a D and a C. This was the first time that he earned anything less than a B. And then, a week later, another D.

At first we were mad. He's just not paying attention to the questions; he's rushing through the tests; he's being careless. We quizzed him before the test and again afterward. How is it that he can know the information before and after, yet not during?

It turns out he's stressed out," came from an exhausted and frustrated father.

"I dread homework time with my 8th grade son. It is a constant battle. Things I have tried and hasn't helped...Gave him a break after school instead of making him do it right away...Taken things from him - ps2, outside play, cricket practice, etc....Making him get it done before he does anything else....I sit down with him at the table and help him with whatever he needs help on, he just does not seem to have any interest in school....it literally takes him about 4 hours to write spelling words and do a 30 problem maths paper and that is with me constantly saying get busy, sit down. I am up for suggestions if anyone has any, how can I make my son enjoy school and take homework serious," cried an upset mother.

"Well, my 7th grader is the same way! Although he gets straight A's, **getting him to do homework is like pulling teeth.** He will procrastinate the entire evening away doing a little here, a little there. I have tried the outside play thing, video game thing, etc., but I think he'd rather sit there and do nothing at all than do homework! A friend of mine has had success with taking her son straight from school to the library to do homework - he doesn't go home until it's done. It's like a "study hall". He ends up finishing it in record time! Unfortunately for me, my younger child is too much of a disruption for me to do that. Another thing that worked for me in the past is that I let him do it before he goes to bed. He will do anything to prolong the bedtime process, and that includes homework. He knows it has to be done by his "official" bedtime, so we time it accordingly. This also gives

him a good amount of time to relax after school and wind down," added another mother.

"I think this might just be a boy thing because I have 3 boys. One in 7th grade, one in 5th grade and one in kinder. These stories remind me very much of them and how hard it is to get them to stay on task and get through their homework. I'm constantly redirecting them to the kitchen table where it's supposed to be done. My 7th grader will sometimes take the entire evening to get finished and it's not because there's too much homework, it's because he's procrastinating. It's amazing on the nights he has after school activities how fast he's done with his homework. They all get good grades, so that's why I think it's just a boy thing, something different in their brains!"

"Getting my step-son to do his homework and turn it in on time is a nightmare. He is currently in 8th grade and has started this lying thing about his homework and sneaking around about everything. He really upsets me because I know he is very bright and is very capable of making A's and B's. But **he does not think it is a big deal if he has D's and F's on his report card.** And on the other hand we have a 2nd grader who is doing great, but struggles in reading and gets frustrated and sometimes cries when it comes to her reading in the homework department. It will all come together eventually, right?"

“I have been going through some changes with my 14 year old son Sam. Last week we received his school report and he had three "unsatisfactory" comments regarding homework. OK, time to do something about it.

Sam and I sat down to chat. What puzzled me was that he usually said to me that he didn't have any homework whenever I asked him. So perhaps this was just a bit of boy laziness to get out of doing something? You know, like the ostrich who sticks its head in the sand to avoid something? Anyhow, I chatted with Sam and said that we needed to make some changes so that he could get his homework done quickly and get on to the good stuff (kicking balls, television). A little bit of bribery goes a long way with a child.

The next day when he came home from school I asked to see his school books. Sam insisted that he had no homework, but upon closer inspection miraculously the homework appeared. It was like ***"oh, that's right. I have to do this worksheet"***. I felt like I was helping a five year get organised. But here's the thing: as parents our job is to help our kids learn to do things for themselves. If they are having problems, you need to go back and meet them where they are at and help them to move forward. It's all about preparing them for the adult world.

I was teaching Sam skills for learning how to get himself organised to do his homework. And this morning when he woke up, he started talking about one of his assignments that he had to do. Hooray! At long last he is starting to understand the importance of homework and planning properly.

Don't expect a miracle; just aim for a bit of improvement each week and give your child plenty of encouragement for a job well done," added a battle-weary mother.

"Throughout primary school Ryan repeatedly dropped the bomb of imminent projects a mere two to three days before they were due on us. Vile threats did little to ameliorate this habit.

His "upgrade" out of primary school seems to have corrected this problem. **My son's increasing maturity seems to be curing him of the last-minute scramble.** I'm already on alert for a project due March 15.

Homework wars were never an issue with Ryan in primary school. Now, however, he's getting much more homework assigned and it's not stuff that can be taken care of in less than 15 minutes. He's actually having to *work*. Gasp!

Our wars are about getting Ryan to prioritize and trying to teach him how to break down assignments into reasonable chunks. His organizational skills and handwriting are a whole other problem.

The other issue we perpetually deal with is Ryan's tendency toward the minimum.

I'm a believer in working up to your potential whether that means extra work or not. **If he can get it done in three sentences, he's not going to write a paragraph** even though writing the paragraph would be the more thorough answer. We're working on that one. Ryan does his homework without being told. We're just trying to get him to the best job he can on it," was added by the mother offered the last speaking spot at the homework forum.

Mr. Faceache thanked everyone for his or her comments.

He then introduced an experienced teacher from the regional office to talk about learning styles with the parents.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOUR SON'S LEARNING STYLES

What Are Learning Styles?

Everyone gathers information about the world through three sensory receivers: visual (sight), auditory (sound), and kinesthetic (movement).

Some people rely most on visual cues, others prefer auditory input, and still others learn best through movement. Educators refer to these differences as learning

styles. According to Cheri Fuller, author of *Unlocking Your Child's Learning Potential*, "Learning style entails how a person best takes in, understands, and remembers information." She adds, "...in most children, one sense is usually more finely tuned and influential for learning than the others."

Assessing Learning Styles

So how do teachers identify students' learning types? Only ten to fifteen percent of schools use formal tests to determine learning styles. I would like to see these percentages increase and the information added to students' permanent records. Most teachers, however, especially in primary school, observe their students closely to determine learning styles. Then they use learning styles strategies that individualize instruction to take advantage of each student's learning type.

Find Your Son's Learning Style

It's not hard to figure out a child's dominant learning style. Does your child have a primarily visual learning style?

- **Visual learners are watchers**

Visual learners are watchers. As babies, they are often drawn to lights, colours, and movement. They revel in colourful toys and piles of picture books. Visual learners enjoy and learn easily from pictures, handouts, videos, and films. In school, they can learn science principles by watching a science experiment rather than having

to conduct the experiment themselves.

- **Auditory learners are listeners**

Auditory learners are listeners. They learn to talk early and, as toddlers, enjoy listening to tapes and playing musical instruments. Auditory learners are talkative. They like to read aloud, recall commercials word for word, and do tongue twisters. In school, they memorize maths facts much more easily in a song or poem than from flash cards.

- **Kinesthetic learners are hands -on types**

Kids who love taking things apart to see how they work are kinesthetic learners. As babies, kinesthetic learners are in constant motion, their movements are well coordinated, and they are anxious to crawl and walk as quickly as possible. In a classroom, kinesthetic learners can be fidgety. They'll often be the first to volunteer to do something –anything–active. They want to do an experiment not watch it or read about it.

Schooling at the high school level favours auditory learning. But students whose dominant learning style is visual or kinesthetic can improve their auditory learning skills. They can also incorporate many study techniques that draw on their learning-style strengths. The first step to taking best advantage of any child's learning style is to identify and learn about it.

Learning styles test – Visual

Read each sentence carefully. Think about how each applies to you. Circle the number that best describes how you feel about each statement.

Key: 1 = almost never 2 = sometimes 3 = often 4 = almost always

1 I can remember some things better if I write them down.

1 2 3 4

2 I am able to visualize/imagine (see) pictures of what I read or am being told, in my head.

1 2 3 4

3 I am able to take lots of notes on what I read and what I hear.

1 2 3 4

4 It helps me to understand what is being said if I look at the person who is speaking.

1 2 3 4

5 It becomes hard for me to understand if I don't look at the person who is speaking.

1 2 3 4

- 6 It is easier for me to get work done in a quiet place.
1 2 3 4
- 7 It is easy for me to understand maps, charts and graphics.
1 2 3 4
- 8 When I am concentrating on reading/writing, the radio/TV distracts me.
1 2 3 4
- 9 When I try to remember something, I can see the page in my mind.
1 2 3 4
- 10 I cannot remember a joke long enough to tell it later.
1 2 3 4
- 11 When I am trying to remember something new – a telephone number for example – it helps me to form a picture of it in my head.
1 2 3 4
- 12 When I get a great idea, I must write it down straight away or I'll forget it.
1 2 3 4

Total

Learning styles test – Auditory

Read each sentence carefully. Think about how each applies to you. Circle the number that best describes how you feel about each statement.

Key: 1 = almost never 2 = sometimes 3 = often 4 = almost always

- 1 When reading, I listen to the words in my head, or I read aloud.
1 2 3 4
- 2 I need the chance to discuss things so that I can understand them.
1 2 3 4
- 3 I prefer it if someone tells me how to do something rather than having to read the directions myself.
1 2 3 4
- 4 I prefer hearing instructions rather than reading them.
1 2 3 4
- 5 I can easily follow what is being said without having to look at the speaker.
1 2 3 4

6 I remember what people say better than what they look like.

1 2 3 4

7 I remember things better if I study aloud with a partner.

1 2 3 4

8 It's hard for me to picture things in my head.

1 2 3 4

9 I find it helpful to talk myself through tasks.

1 2 3 4

10 When learning something new, I prefer to listen to information on it, then do it, rather than read how to do it.

1 2 3 4

11 I like to complete one task before starting another.

1 2 3 4

12 For a longer piece of work or revision it is easier for me to tape it rather than write it.

1 2 3 4

Total

Learning styles test – Kinesthetic

Read each sentence carefully. Think about how each applies to you. Circle the number that best describes how you feel about each statement.

Key: 1 = almost never 2 = sometimes 3 = often 4 = almost always

1 I don't like to read or listen to directions/instructions. I'd rather just start something..

1 2 3 4

2 I can study better when music is playing.

1 2 3 4

3 I need frequent refresher breaks when studying.

1 2 3 4

4 I think better when I have freedom to move around. Studying at a desk is very difficult for me.

1 2 3 4

5 When I can't think of the right word, I use my hands a lot and call it 'thingy' or a 'whatsit', etc.

1 2 3 4

6 When beginning to read an article/book, I like to take a peep at the end of it.

1 2 3 4

7 I take notes but never go back and read them.

1 2 3 4

8 I may look disorganized but I know where everything is.

1 2 3 4

9 I use my fingers to count.

1 2 3 4

10 I move my lips when I read to myself.

1 2 3 4

11 I daydream.

1 2 3 4

12 I would rather create my own project than report on someone else's.

1 2 3 4

Total

How to Use Learning Style Profiles

Teachers who get students to do a learning style preference test are equipped with important information and opportunities.

1. The first reaction from many students is to think (or say), you care enough about me to want to know my preferred learning style. That's a big tick for the teacher. It builds a strong connection with the student.
2. Many teachers start using this new information by applying it to one on one situations with students in the classroom. Simply check your list to see a student's preference before going to assist them. Use examples from their preferred learning styles to help them understand the issue or concept at hand.
3. Encourage students to prepare study materials in the format of their preferred learning styles. E.g For visual learners – create picture images of key information.
4. When you are comfortable with a class of students and their learning style range, integrate more of their preferred learning styles into your teaching.
5. Give students choices on how they approach assessment tasks. Many students will prepare thoroughly if they can use their preferred learning style. E.g. posters, Powerpoint presentation, etc.

Help Me Motivate My Visual Learner

Visual learners feel less frustrated and more motivated when they incorporate seeing into their studies. As a parent, you can use this knowledge to help your son focus on the strengths of his visual learning style to maximize his learning potential—even in subjects he previously struggled with.

Try some of these visual learning style strategies to boost your son's comprehension and retention:

Use colour.

Buy a rainbow of coloured, fine-point markers, pencils, and highlighters. When your kid takes notes, encourage him to use different coloured pens for different concepts. Write spelling words, formulas ($E=MC^2$), or key concepts three times: first in red, then in purple, and finally in blue. Encourage him to highlight important passages and points in stand-out shades such as neon blue.

Look at the pictures first.

Before he reads a passage from his textbook, suggest that he go through and look at all the pictures, diagrams, and charts in the chapter and try to determine what points they are illustrating. When he reads the chapter, picturing the illustrations

will help him remember key concepts. Of the three primary learning styles (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic), visual learners get the most out of this tip.

Use flashcards.

Flashcards can help boost retention in your visual learner. Suggest he use them for maths facts, vocabulary, or anything else he needs to memorize. For history class, write dates on one side of the card and the key points about those dates on the other side.

See with the mind's eye.

Challenge your son to visualize key facts or spelling words in his head when he's trying to memorize them.

Take notes.

Encourage your son to write down explanations for points that are difficult to understand at first. By taking notes and seeing the information in different colors, he will clarify concepts and memorize them more readily.

Sit in front.

Help your son pay closer attention during classes by suggesting that he keep his eye on the teachers at all times.

Get it in writing.

Tell your son, "If your teacher writes it on the board, write it in your notes." Prompt your visual learner to ask the teacher to repeat verbal directions or supply written directions whenever possible.

Help Me Motivate My Auditory Learner

Auditory learners process and remember information best when they hear it and repeat it. You can use this knowledge to help your auditory learner customize his study habits. By recognizing his learning type and focusing on his strengths, you can help him succeed—even in subjects he struggled with previously.

Try some of these teacher-tested learning styles strategies to help your auditory learner boost his comprehension and retention.

Read aloud and repeat.

Read aloud and repeat. Have your son use a highlighter to mark key concepts in handouts, textbooks, and written instructions.

Then have him read the highlighted material aloud. When he needs to memorize facts—like the parts of a cell or spelling words—ask him to repeat the facts aloud to you several times. At school, encourage him to volunteer to read aloud to the class or a learning partner.

Record and review

To boost retention, have your son record lessons on a hand-held tape recorder. (Get

the teacher's permission first). He can then review material at home, while riding in the car, etc. If he takes written notes, have him read them into the recorder and play them back to improve comprehension. He can also tape himself reading chapters from his textbooks and then listen to the tape to review.

Discuss.

Challenge your son to explain new concepts to you. If he's studying photosynthesis, ask him questions like "What role does the sun play?" When he has required reading for English class, prompt him to retell the main points of the story, poem, or essay in his own words.

Practice word association.

Encourage your son to use rhymes, acronyms, and jingles to help recall facts more easily, like Roy G. Biv (the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet).

Use audiotapes and CDs.

Have him ask the local librarian if a required book is available on CD. Tip: To increase comprehension, have him follow the text as he listens to the book.

Participate.

Urge your son to participate in class discussions and debates as well as ask questions during class to clarify concepts. Also, encourage your son to join study groups or find a study partner so he can discuss materials with peers.

Go to the head of the class.

Remind your son to sit in the front of the class so he can hear easily and stay focused on the teacher. Of the three primary learning styles (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic), auditory learners get the most out of this tip.

Ask for help.

Encourage your son to ask friends and family members to quiz him orally as he prepares for tests. Or encourage him to ask his teacher to explain written concepts orally to boost comprehension and retention.

Help Me Motivate My Kinesthetic Learner

Kinesthetic learners process information and solve problems most efficiently (and happily) when they can turn learning into a hands-on activity. You can use this knowledge to help your kinesthetic learner customize his study habits. By recognizing his learning type and focusing on his strengths, you can help him succeed—even in subjects he previously struggled with.

Try some of these teacher-tested learning styles strategies to help your kinesthetic learner boost his comprehension and retention.

Get a Grip on It

Whenever possible, help your son choose projects that let him use his hands. If he is studying the solar system, have him build a model of it. For social studies or history, have him locate the region being studied on a map or globe.

Take Centre Stage

Urge your son to participate in science fairs, plays, and art shows so he can shine. If he is social, encourage him to volunteer to work with younger kids or help out at a local animal shelter. These types of activities will boost self-esteem and motivation.

Get More from Reading

When he reads, prompt him to follow along with his fingers or a bookmark to boost comprehension. Also, encourage your child to use bright colors to underline, circle, and highlight new concepts.

Have him rewrite relevant facts or key concepts in his own words. Jotting down main points of new material will help him retain information. Try having him record his notes on tape and listen to study during a long walk.

Ham it up! Have him act out a passage from the book he is assigned or put on a skit to demonstrate what he is studying. Be his audience or better yet get in on the act and play a role yourself.

Give Him a Break

To help your son focus better and avoid getting bored, allow him to study in short time blocks (no more than thirty minutes at a time) and encourage him to do a physical activity during that break, such walking the dog or shooting some hoops.

Explore Together

Visit natural history museums, botanical gardens, and planetariums. Keep an eye out for exhibits or programs that relate to things he is learning in class. If he is

learning about ancient Egypt, go to a museum to experience items from ancient Egypt firsthand.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST HOMEWORK

100 Years of Homework

In the early 20th century, the mind was viewed as a muscle that could be strengthened through mental exercise. Since exercise could be done at home, homework was viewed favourably. During the 1940s, schools began shifting their emphasis from memorization to problem solving. Homework fell out of favour because it was closely associated with the repetition of material. In the 1950s,

Australians worried that education lacked rigor and left children unprepared for the new technologies, such as computers. Homework, it was believed, could speed up learning.

In the 1960s, educators and parents became concerned that homework was crowding out social experience, outdoor recreation and creative activities. Two decades later, in the 1980s, homework again came back into favour as it came to be viewed as one way to stem a rising tide of mediocrity in education. The push for more homework continued into the 1990s, fueled by rising academic standards.

To Do or Not To Do Homework?

Homework can have many benefits for young children. It can improve remembering and understanding of schoolwork. **Homework can help students develop study skills that** will be of value even after they leave school. It can teach them that learning takes place anywhere, not just in the classroom. Homework can benefit children in more general ways as well. It can foster positive character traits such as independence and responsibility. Homework can teach children how to manage time.

Homework, if not properly assigned and monitored, can also have negative effects on children. Educators and parents worry that students will grow bored if they are required to spend too much time on schoolwork. Homework can prevent children from taking part in leisure-time and community activities that also teach important life skills. Homework can lead to undesirable character traits if it

promotes cheating, either through the copying of assignments or help with homework that goes beyond tutoring.

The issue for educators and parents is not which list of effects, the positive or negative, is correct. To a degree, both are. It is the job of parents and educators to maximize the benefit of homework and minimize the costs.

Is It Enough Homework?

The most critical question about homework is "How much homework should students do?" Experts **agree that the amount of homework should depend on the age and skills of the student**. Many groups of teachers and parents suggest that homework for children in kindergarten through second grade is most effective when it does not exceed 10-20 minutes each day. In third through sixth grade, children can benefit from 30-60 minutes of homework per day. High school students can benefit from more time on homework, and the amount may vary from night to night.

Reading at home is especially important for young children. High-interest reading assignments might push the time on homework a bit beyond the minutes suggested above.

These recommendations are consistent with the conclusions reached by many studies on the effectiveness of homework. For young children, research shows that shorter and more frequent assignments may be more effective than longer but

fewer assignments. This is because young children have short spans of attention and need to feel they have successfully completed a task.

Types of Homework

Homework assignments typically have one or more purposes. The most common purpose is to have students practice material already presented in class. **Practice** homework is meant to reinforce learning and help the student master specific skills. **Preparation** homework introduces material that will be presented in future lessons. These assignments aim to help students learn new material better when it is covered in class. **Extension** homework asks students to apply skills they already have to new situations. **Integration** homework requires the student to apply many different skills to a single task, such as book reports, science projects or creative writing.

In particular, maths homework starts to become important in the fourth grade and is increasingly important in the upper grades.

Time Magazine has an article on why homework is a bad thing for school kids. They cite Alfie Kohn.

Kohn's claim is simple: There is not one single study that shows that homework helps kids learn. At the same time kids have less and less time to just be kids – time spent on homework has gone up 50% since 1981.

And if your first thought is “**But how could you have a school without homework**” you’ll be glad to hear that some schools have been doing just fine without homework for many years now.

Rethinking Homework

By **Alfie Kohn**

After spending most of the day in school, children are typically given additional assignments to be completed at home. This is a rather curious fact when you stop to think about it, but not as curious as the fact that few people ever stop to think about it.

It becomes even more curious, for that matter, in light of three other facts:

1. The negative effects of homework are well known.

They include children’s frustration and exhaustion, lack of time for other activities, and possible loss of interest in learning. Many parents lament the impact of homework on their relationship with their children; they may also resent having to play the role of enforcer and worry that they will be criticized either for not being involved enough with the homework or for becoming too involved.

2. The positive effects of homework are largely mythical.

I've spent a lot of time sifting through the research. The results are nothing short of stunning. For starters, there is absolutely no evidence of any academic benefit from assigning homework in primary or lower years at high school. For younger students, in fact, there isn't even a *correlation* between whether children do homework (or how much they do) and any meaningful measure of achievement. At the high school level, the correlation is weak and tends to disappear when more sophisticated statistical measures are applied. Meanwhile, no study has ever substantiated the belief that homework builds character or teaches good study habits.

3. More homework is being piled on children despite the absence of its value.

Over the last quarter-century the burden has increased most for the youngest children, for whom the evidence of positive effects isn't just dubious; it's nonexistent.

It's not as though most teachers decide now and then that a certain lesson really ought to continue after school is over because meaningful learning is so likely to result from such an assignment that it warrants the intrusion on family time.

Homework in most schools isn't limited to those occasions when it seems appropriate and important. Rather, the point of departure seems to be: "We've decided ahead of time that children will have to do *something* every night (or

several times a week). Later on we'll figure out what to make them do.”

I've heard from countless people across the country about the frustration they feel over homework. Parents who watch a torrent of busy work spill out of their children's backpacks wish they could help teachers understand how the cons overwhelmingly outweigh the pros. And teachers who have long harboured doubts about the value of homework feel pressured by those parents who mistakenly believe that a lack of afterschool assignments reflects an insufficient commitment to academic achievement. Such parents seem to reason that as long as their kids have lots of stuff to do every night, never mind what it is, then learning must be taking place.

What parents *and* teachers need is support from administrators who are willing to challenge the conventional wisdom. They need principals who question the slogans that pass for arguments: **that homework creates a link between school and family** (as if there weren't more constructive ways to make that connection!), or that it “reinforces” what students were taught in class (a word that denotes the repetition of rote behaviours, not the development of understanding), or that it teaches children self-discipline and responsibility (a claim for which absolutely no evidence exists).

Above all, principals need to help their faculties see that the most important criterion for judging decisions about homework is the impact they're likely to have

on students' *attitudes* about what they're doing. **“Most of what homework is doing is driving kids away from learning,”** says education professor Harvey Daniels. Let's face it: Most children dread homework, or at best see it as something to be gotten through. Thus, even if it did provide other benefits, they would have to be weighed against its likely effect on kids' love of learning.

So what's a thoughtful principal to do?

1. Educate yourself and share what you've learned with teachers, parents, and central office administrators.

Make sure you know what the research *really* says – that there is no reason to believe that children would be at any disadvantage in terms of their academic learning or life skills if they had much less homework, or even none at all. Whatever decisions are made should be based on fact rather than folk wisdom.

2. Rethink standardized “homework policies.”

Requiring teachers to give a certain number of minutes of homework every day, or to make assignments on the same schedule every week (for example, *x* minutes of maths on Tuesdays and Thursdays) is a frank admission that homework isn't justified by a given lesson, much less is it a response to what specific kids need at a specific time. Such policies sacrifice thoughtful instruction in order to achieve predictability, and they manage to do a disservice not only to students but, when

imposed from above, to teachers as well.

3. Reduce the amount – but don't stop there.

Many parents are understandably upset with how much time their children have to spend on homework. At a minimum, make sure that teachers aren't exceeding guidelines and that they aren't chronically underestimating how long it takes students to complete the assignments. (As one mother told me, "It's cheating to say this is 20 minutes of homework if only your fastest kid can complete it in that time.") Then work on reducing the amount of homework irrespective of such guidelines and expectations so that families, not schools, decide how they will spend most of their evenings.

Quantity, however, is not the only issue that needs to be addressed. Some assignments, frankly, aren't worth even five minutes of a student's time. Too many first graders are forced to clip words from magazines that begin with a given letter of the alphabet. Too many fifth graders have to colour in an endless list of factor pairs on graph paper. Too many eighth graders spend their evenings inching their way through dull, overstuffed, committee-written textbooks, one chapter at a time. Teachers should be invited to reflect on whether any given example of homework will help students think deeply about questions that matter. What philosophy of teaching, what theory of learning, lies behind each assignment? Does it seem to assume that children are meaning makers -- or empty vessels? Is learning regarded as a process that's mostly active or passive? Is it about wrestling with

ideas or mindlessly following directions?

4. Change the default.

Ultimately, it's not enough just to have less homework or even better homework. We should change the fundamental expectation in our schools so that students are asked to take schoolwork home only when there's a reasonable likelihood that a particular assignment will be beneficial to most of them. When that's not true, they should be free to spend their after-school hours as they choose. The bottom line:

No homework except on those occasions when it's truly necessary.

This, of course, is a reversal of the current default state, which amounts to an endorsement of homework for its own sake, regardless of the content, a view that simply can't be justified.

5. Ask the kids.

Find out what students think of homework and solicit their suggestions – perhaps by distributing anonymous questionnaires. Many adults simply assume that homework is useful for promoting learning without even inquiring into the experience of the learners themselves! Do students find that homework really is useful? Why or why not? Are certain kinds better than others? How does homework affect their *desire* to learn? What are its other effects on their lives, and on their families?

6. Suggest that teachers assign only what they design.

In most cases, students should be asked to do only what teachers are willing to create themselves, as opposed to prefabricated worksheets or generic exercises photocopied from textbooks. Also, it rarely makes sense to give the same assignment to all students in a class because it's unlikely to be beneficial for most of them. Those who already understand the concept will be wasting their time, and those who don't understand will become increasingly frustrated. There is no perfect assignment that will stimulate every student because one size simply doesn't fit all. On those days when homework really seems necessary, teachers should create several assignments fitted to different interests and capabilities.

It's better to give no homework to anyone than the same homework to everyone.

7. Use homework as an opportunity to involve students in decision-making.

One way to judge the quality of a classroom is by the extent to which students participate in making choices about their learning. The best teachers know that ***children learn how to make good decisions by making decisions, not by following directions.*** Students should have something to say about what they're going to learn and the circumstances under which they'll learn it, as well as how (and when) their learning will be evaluated, how the room will be set up, how

conflicts will be resolved, and a lot more.

What is true of education in general is true of homework in particular. At least two investigators have found that the most impressive teachers (as defined by various criteria) tend to involve students in decisions about assignments rather than simply telling them what they'll have to do at home. A reasonable first question for a parent to ask upon seeing a homework assignment is ***“How much say did the kids have in determining how this had to be done, and on what schedule, and whether it really needed to be completed at home in the first place?”***

A discussion about whether homework might be useful (and why) can be valuable in its own right. If opinions are varied, the question of what to do when everyone doesn't agree – take a vote? Keep talking until we reach consensus? Look for a compromise? – develops social skills as well as intellectual growth. And that growth occurs precisely because the teacher asked rather than told. ***Teachers who consult with their students on a regular basis would shake their heads vigorously were you to suggest that kids will always say no to homework*** – or to anything else that requires effort. It's just not true, they'll tell you. When students are treated with respect, when the assignments are worth doing, most kids relish a challenge.

If, on the other hand, students groan about, or try to avoid, homework, it's

generally because they get too much of it, or because it's assigned thoughtlessly and continuously, or simply because they had nothing to say about it. The benefits of even high-quality assignments are limited if students feel "done to" instead of "worked with."

8. Help teachers move away from grading.

Your faculty may need your support, encouragement, and practical suggestions to help them abandon a model in which assignments are checked off or graded, where the point is to enforce compliance, and toward a model in which students explain and explore with one another what they've done -- what they liked and disliked about the book they read, what they're struggling with, what new questions they came up with. As the eminent educator Martin Haberman observed, *homework in the best classrooms "is not checked - it is shared."* If students conclude that there's no point in spending time on assignments that aren't going to be collected or somehow recorded, that's not an argument for setting up bribes and threats and a climate of distrust; it's an indictment of the homework itself.

9. Experiment.

Ask teachers who are reluctant to rethink their long-standing reliance on traditional homework to see what happens if, during a given week or curriculum unit, they tried assigning none. Surely anyone who believes that homework is beneficial should be willing to test that assumption by investigating the

consequences of its absence. What are the effects of a moratorium on students' achievement, on their interest in learning, on their moods and the resulting climate of the classroom? Likewise, the school as a whole can try out a new policy, such as the change in default that I've proposed, on a tentative basis before committing to it permanently.

Principals deal with an endless series of crises; they're called upon to resolve complaints, soothe wounded egos, negotiate solutions, try to keep everyone happy, and generally make the buses run on time. In such a position there is a strong temptation to avoid new initiatives that call the status quo into question.

Considerable gumption is required to take on an issue like homework, particularly during an era when phrases like "raising the bar" and "higher standards" are used to rationalize practices that range from foolish to inappropriate to hair-raising. But of course a principal's ultimate obligation is to do what's right by the children, to protect them from harmful mandates and practices that persist not because they're valuable but merely because they're traditional.

For anyone willing to shake things up in order to do what makes sense, beginning a conversation about homework is a very good place to start.

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

**JACK'S MUM WAS A BIT
CONFUSED AT THIS STAGE.**

What was she to make of all these comments and this contradictory information. More homework. Less homework. No homework. Supervised homework, unsupervised homework. She was getting a headache trying to figure out her thoughts and trying to put Jack's best interest at the forefront was getting harder

to do.

While considering her decision of how to proceed and what to believe, she took a look at what people were suggesting parents do.

Make it a team effort:

Remind your child that you're not the enemy, says Jeffrey Bernstein, PhD, author of "10 Days to a Less Defiant Child." "Let him know you're on his team," he says. Instead of pressuring him, give him a running start: Organize the material, help him do the first few problems, cheerlead as needed. Once a project is partially complete, it doesn't seem so overwhelming.

Play to the child's strengths:

If a child is paralyzed by homework, says Bernstein, "**Try to encourage his identity as an achiever.**" Instead of offering vague praise such as, "You're a smart kid," he recommends drawing specific parallels to areas in which the child excels. For example, if your son is going for a brown belt in karate, praise him for sticking with it while other kids dropped out, and encourage him to kick the homework in the head.

Resist the urge to punish:

Shouting, though often cathartic, is counterproductive. "Never pair something you want a child to do with anything aversive," says Alan Kazdin, PhD, director of the Yale Parenting Center & Child Conduct Clinic and author of "The Kazdin Method for

Parenting the Defiant Child." "One of the worst things a teacher can do," says Kazdin, "is have a student write something on the board 100 times."

Speak the right language:

Kids relate to stories, not lectures. To win the trust of your son or daughter, suggests Bernstein, share a story about how you hated your seventh-grade maths teacher, too. "Make disclosures about times in your life when you procrastinated or felt overwhelmed," Bernstein advises.

Practice, practice, practice:

"Ask yourself, 'If I were a homework "coach," how would I approach the problem?'" suggests Dan Kindlon, PhD, a professor of child psychology at Harvard University and the author of "Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age." And Kazdin suggests starting out slowly, settling for two-minute increments of solid work, and then building from there. "You're not going to get 45 minutes of homework tomorrow," says Kazdin, "but next week, you will."

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOMEWORK SOLUTIONS

Homework has been around as long as public schools have, and over the years considerable research has been conducted regarding the efficacy of homework practices. While the results are not uniform, most experts on the topic have drawn some common conclusions.

More history on homework

Harris Cooper, a leading homework researcher, examined more than 100 studies on the effects of homework and concluded that there is little evidence that homework at the primary school level has an impact on school achievement.

Studies at the lower high school levels have found some modest benefits of homework, but studies of homework at the high school level have found that it has clear benefits.

Despite mixed research on homework effects, many teachers believe that assigning homework offers other benefits besides contributing to school achievement.

Homework teaches children how to take responsibility for tasks and how to work independently. That is, homework helps children develop *habits of mind* that will serve them well as they proceed through school and, indeed, through life. Specifically, homework helps children learn how to plan and organize tasks, manage time, make choices, and problem solve, all skills that contribute to effective functioning in the adult world of work and families.

Reasonable Homework Expectations

It is generally agreed that the younger the child, the less time the child should be expected to devote to homework. A general rule of thumb is that children do 10 minutes of homework for each grade level. Therefore, first graders should be expected to do about 10 minutes of homework, second graders 20 minutes, third graders 30 minutes, and so on. If your child is spending more than 10 minutes per grade level on work at night, then you may want to talk with your child's teacher about adjusting the workload.

Strategies to Make Homework Go More Smoothly

There are two key strategies parents can draw on to reduce homework hassles. The first is to establish clear routines around homework, including when and where homework gets done and setting up daily schedules for homework. The second is to build in rewards or incentives to use with children for whom "good grades" is not a sufficient reward for doing homework.

Homework Routines

Tasks are easiest to accomplish when tied to specific routines. By establishing daily routines for homework completion, you will not only make homework go more smoothly, but you will also be fostering a sense of order your child can apply to later life, including university and work.

Step 1. Find a location in the house where homework will be done.

The right location will depend on your child and the culture of your family. Some children do best at a desk in their bedroom. It is a quiet location, away from the hubbub of family noise. Other children become too distracted by the things they keep in their bedroom and do better at a place removed from those distractions, like the dining room table. **Some children need to work by themselves.** Others need to have parents nearby to help keep them on task and to answer

questions when problems arise. Ask your child where the best place is to work. Both you and your child need to discuss pros and cons of different settings to arrive at a mutually agreed upon location.

Step 2. Set up a homework centre.

Once you and your child have identified a location, fix it up as a home office/homework centre. Make sure there is a clear workspace large enough to set out all the materials necessary for completing assignments. Outfit the homework centre with the kinds of supplies your child is most likely to need, such as pencils, pens, coloured markers, rulers, scissors, a dictionary and thesaurus, graph paper, construction paper, glue and cellophane tape, lined paper, a calculator, spell checker, and, depending on the age and needs of your child, a computer or laptop. If the homework centre is a place that will be used for other things (such as the dining room table), then your child can keep the supplies in a portable crate or bin. If possible, the homework centre should include a bulletin board that can hold a monthly calendar on which your child can keep track of long term assignments. Allowing children some leeway in decorating the homework centre can help them feel at home there, but you should be careful that it does not become too cluttered with distracting materials.

Step 3. Establish a homework time.

Your child should get in the habit of doing homework at the same time every day.

The time may vary depending on the individual child. Some children **need a break right after school** to get some exercise and have a snack. Others need to start homework while they are still in a school mode (i.e., right after school when there is still some momentum left from getting through the day). In general, it may be best to get homework done either before dinner or as early in the evening as the child can tolerate. The later it gets, the more tired the child becomes and the more slowly the homework gets done.

Step 4. Establish a daily homework schedule.

In general, at least into early high school, the homework session should begin with you sitting down with your child and drawing up a homework schedule. You should review all the assignments and make sure your child understands them and has all the necessary materials. Ask your child to estimate how long it will take to complete each assignment. Then ask when each assignment will get started. If your child needs help with any assignment, then this should be determined at the beginning so that the start times can take into account parent availability.

Incentive Systems

Many children who are not motivated by the enjoyment of doing homework are motivated by the high grade they hope to earn as a result of doing a quality job. Thus, the grade is an incentive, **motivating the child to do homework with**

care and in a timely manner. For children who are not motivated by grades, parents will need to look for other rewards to help them get through their nightly chores. Incentive systems fall into two categories: simple and elaborate.

Simple incentive systems.

The simplest incentive system is reminding the child of a *fun activity to do when homework is done*. It may be a favourite television show, a chance to spend some time with a video or computer game, talking on the telephone or instant messaging, or playing a game with a parent. This system of withholding fun things until the drudgery is over is sometimes called Grandma's Law because grandmothers often use it quite effectively (**"First take out the rubbish, then you can have a chocolate biscuit."**). Having something to look forward to can be a powerful incentive to get the hard work done. When parents remind children of this as they sit down at their desks they may be able to spark the engine that drives the child to stick with the work until it is done.

Elaborate incentive systems.

These involve more planning and more work on the part of parents but in some cases are necessary to address more significant homework problems. More complex incentives systems might include a structure for earning points that could be used to "purchase" privileges or rewards or a system that provides greater

reward for accomplishing more difficult homework tasks. These systems work best when parents and children together develop them. Giving children input gives them a sense of control and ownership, making the system more likely to succeed. We have found that children are generally realistic in setting goals and deciding on rewards and penalties when they are involved in the decision-making process.

Building in breaks.

These are good for the child who cannot quite make it to the end without a small reward en route. When creating the daily homework schedule, it may be useful with these children to identify when they will take their breaks. Some children prefer to take breaks at specific time intervals (every 15 minutes), while others do better when the breaks occur after they finish an activity. If you use this approach, you should discuss with your child how long the breaks will last and what will be done during the breaks (get a snack, call a friend, play one level on a video game).

Building in choice.

This can be an effective strategy for parents to use with children who resist homework. Choice can be incorporated into both the order in which the child agrees to complete assignments and the schedule they will follow to get the work done. Building in choice not only helps motivate children but can also reduce power struggles between parents and children.

Developing Incentive Systems

Step 1. Describe the problem behaviours.

Parents and children decide which behaviours are causing problems at homework time. For some children putting homework off to the last minute is the problem; for others, it is forgetting materials or neglecting to write down assignments. Still others rush through their work and make careless mistakes, while others dawdle over assignments, taking hours to complete what should take only a few minutes. It is important to be as specific as possible when describing the problem behaviours. The problem behaviour should be described as behaviours that can be seen or heard; for instance, *complains about homework* or *rushes through homework*, *making many mistakes* are better descriptors than *has a bad attitude* or *is lazy*.

Step 2. Set a goal.

Usually the goal relates directly to the problem behaviour. For instance, if not writing down assignments is the problem, the goal might be: "Joe will write down his assignments in his assignment book for every class."

Step 3. Decide on possible rewards and penalties.

Homework incentive systems work best when children have a menu of rewards to

choose from, since no single reward will be attractive for long. We recommend a point system in which points can be earned for the goal behaviours and traded in for the reward the child wants to earn. The bigger the reward, the more points the child will need to earn it. The menu should include both larger, more expensive rewards that may take a week or a month to earn and smaller, inexpensive rewards that can be earned daily. It may also be necessary to build penalties into the system. This is usually the loss of a privilege (such as the chance to watch a favourite TV show or the chance to talk on the telephone to a friend).

Once the system is up and running, and if you find your child is earning more penalties than rewards, then the program needs to be revised so that your child can be more successful. Usually when **this kind of system fails, we think of it as a design failure** rather than the failure of the child to respond to rewards. It may be a good idea if you are having difficulty designing a system that works to consult a specialist, such as a school psychologist or counsellor, for assistance.

Step 4. Write a homework contract.

The contract should say exactly what the child agrees to do and exactly what the parents' roles and responsibilities will be. When the contract is in place, it should reduce some of the tension parents and kids often experience around homework. For instance, if part of the contract is that the child will earn a point for not complaining about homework, then if the child *does* complain, this should not be cause for a battle between parent and child: the child simply does not earn that

point. Parents should also be sure to **praise their children** for following the contract. It will be important for parents to agree to a contract they can live with; that is, avoiding penalties they are either unable or unwilling to impose (e.g., if both parents work and are not at home, they cannot monitor whether a child is beginning homework right after school, so an alternative contract may need to be written).

We have found that it is a rare incentive system that works the first time. Parents should expect to try it out and redesign it to work the kinks out. Eventually, once the child is used to doing the behaviours specified in the contract, the contract can be rewritten to work on another problem behaviour. Your child over time may be willing to drop the use of an incentive system altogether. This is often a long-term goal, however, and you should be ready to write a new contract if your child slips back to bad habits once a system is dropped.

Involving Siblings

Parents often ask how they can develop one kind of system for one child in the family and not for all children, since it may seem to be "rewarding" children with problems while neglecting those without. Most siblings understand this process if it is explained to them carefully. If there are problems, however, parents have several choices: (a) Set up a similar system for other children with appropriate goals (*every child has something they could be working to improve*), (b) make a

more informal arrangement by promising to do something special from time to time with the other children in the family so they do not feel left out, or (c) have the child earn rewards that benefit the whole family (e.g., eating out at a favourite restaurant).

Adaptations and Further Support

Suggestions provided in this section will need to be adapted to the particular age of your child. Greater supervision and involvement on the part of parents is the norm with children during the primary school years, while, by high school, most parents find they can pull back and let their children take more control over homework schedules. Early high school is often the turning point, and parents will need to make decisions about how involved to be in homework based on the developmental level of their children. If problems arise that seem intractable at any age, consult your child's teacher or a school psychologist.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MUM'S HOMEWORK

Ready for Tonight's Homework Meltdown?

You may not find '**homework meltdown**' in the dictionary, but millions of parents know exactly what one is:

- A fit or tantrum brought on when students are overloaded, exhausted and overwhelmed by homework. Students simply fall apart and are unable or unwilling to understand or finish their homework.

As if a distraught and upset child isn't bad enough, homework meltdowns affect the *entire* family. Everybody's afternoon and evening is ruined.

Nice, huh?

Believe it or not, some students have a homework meltdown night after night, year after year! Tears, crying, yelling, fighting, pleading - this is what these children will remember about their childhood and school.

Homework meltdowns are not inevitable, and parents should not tolerate anything that brings such negativity and ugliness into their homes. Before we discuss how to deal with meltdowns, ask yourself these questions.

2 Questions About Homework Meltdowns

Do They Happen Often?

Everybody- including children - has a bad day now and then. A meltdown once in a blue moon is no big deal. Write a homework note to the teacher, and send your child to bed early. If your child is having homework breakdowns on a regular basis, there is an underlying problem that must be solved. Is their homework too difficult? Is there simply too much of it? Is your child doing her homework at his 'best time?' Discover and support your child's Homework Personality to stop that homework meltdown in its tracks!

Are They Real?

Oh, those kids are smart! It takes them about half a second to figure out what works and what doesn't. If they pitch a homework fit, and you make it all better (no homework, an ice cream, etc.), who can blame them for trying it over and over again?

How to Prevent Homework Meltdowns

When it comes to preventing homework meltdowns, students need a homework situation that supports their homework personality PLUS these three (3) things:

Sleep Study after study (and teacher after teacher) will tell you that sleepy students do not learn as well- or as quickly- as students that are well-rested. Many meltdowns are the **result of chronic sleep deprivation**. Those babies are tired! Make certain that your child is getting enough sleep every night.

Time Off Can we give these kids a break, please? They go to school all day, and then we expect them to sit down and do more work at home. It's too much! Not only do they need a break every day, they should have a break from homework on weekends and holidays as well. (Please don't tell me that students had better 'get used to it.' Adults don't get used to working all day, bringing work home and working on vacation.)

Regular routine If homework happens at the same time, place and duration each school day, it becomes less of an issue than if those things constantly change. Establish a reasonable, sensible homework routine for your children to help them look at homework as 'no big deal,' just part of the day.

Warning for Parents

Parents, it might take some time, but you *can* stop those meltdowns! Just make absolutely certain that you **don't**:

Get dragged into the drama! I know, it's hard to stay cool when your child is having a meltdown. But, you must do it! No arguing back and forth, yelling, pleading, making insane promises ("Just do this maths sheet, and I'll buy you a video game!"). You must stay calm, nip the meltdown in the bud and seek long-term solutions.

Don't do the homework for them! Many parents admit that, when homework becomes too unbearable, they do it for their kids. Stop! It would be better to write across the page ***My child was having a meltdown, so I told him to stop here.*** than to do your child's homework. The teacher needs to be aware of students' homework havoc; and, your child needs to understand that you will help them but

you will NOT do their work for them.

Do You Have A Homework Friendly Home?

Parents, ask yourself, "Could I do *my* homework in our house?"

You really, really want to have a 'homework friendly' home. It's no biggie - you've done it before.

When your baby first begins to scoot and roll, it is a good idea for you, the parent, to get down on *your* hands and knees and crawl around. You soon realize that it's another world down on the floor, full of fascinating things like shiny coins and dead flies and electrical sockets just waiting to be stuck with slim, metal objects.

Your child is no longer a baby, but it is time, once again, for you to try to see the world from his perspective.

The Homework Five

Students need five things in place to do homework: quiet, time, space and comfort, proper lighting, and materials.

Quiet

When it comes to noise tolerance, every person and family is different.

You might be thinking, "I like a noisy house! I thrive on commotion! It energizes me!" But, this is not about you; **it is about your child and his ability to do his homework.** Your children may be used to your home's noisy environment in general, but doing homework requires concentration. Distractions must be kept to a minimum so that your child has no choice but to focus on reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic.

Is your child easily distracted - or could a herd of elephants stomp through his bedroom unnoticed? Let him have enough noise to feel comfortable, but not enough noise to take the focus away from his homework. I have found that most children can work quite well with **low noise and no action.** This usually means a very low radio, but no TV; the door open to hear- but not see- what is going on in the rest of the house.

Parents, you must monitor this! If you realize that your child is having difficulty

doing his homework with the radio on - turn it off. If he jumps up and yells, "Hey, who's that?" every time the front door opens- his bedroom door might need to stay closed.

Time

I once had a 5th grade student that never seemed to turn his homework in more than once or twice a week. He told me that when he got home from school, he had to take care of his two little brothers. When his mum came home from work, the family usually went out to eat, then stopped by relatives' homes or ran errands. By the time my student got home, it was late and he was exhausted. My student was telling the truth. His mother readily admitted that her son had to "help with his brothers and then we have stuff to do with my boyfriend."

Once again, I am asking you to put yourself in your child's shoes. **Does your child have regular homework time - free of chores, responsibilities, activities?** Is he constantly interrupted by you, his siblings, the telephone? One of the most frustrating things about being a work at home parent (especially of small children) is not having "chunks" of time to work. You constantly have to get up and do something for somebody. It is nearly impossible to stay focused and productive.

It is also extremely difficult to be productive when you are tired. Many children come home from school exhausted and simply cannot concentrate on homework. Others have so much to do right after school that even if they find time for

homework, they cannot give it 100%. I have come to believe that extracurricular activities are fundamentally more important than homework, but that does not mean I want children to trade hours and hours of homework for hours and hours of activities.

Here is how I feel about sleep and homework. ***Decide how much time your family is going to devote to homework, and try to carve out that amount of time during the day.*** If it's possible, make it the same general time each day, so that a routine can be established. Children crave routine. Once again, think about your child's personality and whether or not your family's homework time should be right after school, before dinner, after dinner, before baths, after TV, before lessons, etc. My son does his homework in the morning. When he comes home from school, he is *tired* of school! He wants to play, watch TV, go to taekwondo practice. Forcing him to do homework is not fun for anybody! Decide what works best for your family.

Space and Comfort

Children don't need a lot of space, but they do need somewhere to do their homework. In an ideal world, all children would have fancy homework lounges like the ones in decorating magazines: sturdy desks and comfy chairs, huge areas to spread out materials, bulletin boards, computers, and easy-to-reach bookshelves. In real life, however, space and decorating budgets are often at a minimum, so parents must do the best we can. Growing up, I always had a desk in my bedroom- even though I rarely used it for homework. My parents' clear message was **School Is Important and We Will Make Sure That You Have A Place to Study and Do**

Homework. This same homework-is-important message can be expressed by clearing off the kitchen table or counter during homework time. Other families might put a hollow-core door on top of two metal file cabinets or pull a folding card table from under the couch. **Styles vary; the point is that your child has a dedicated place to do homework.** I try to have a reading corner in all of my classrooms. It is never fancy - just a big rug, pillows and lots of books. My students fly over to the reading corner as soon as they finish their class work because they love to lay on the floor and read in *comfort*. The reading corner is relaxing and cozy. Give your child a comfortable place to read and do their homework, and they might actually spend some quality time there. Don't make it *too comfortable* or they could end up snoozing instead of studying!

Lighting

Does your home have adequate lighting for reading, studying and doing homework? **It may be fine to turn the lights down low for some activities, but reading, studying and doing homework require proper lighting.** There are two main types of lighting:

Overhead lighting ensures that the entire room is well-lit

Task lighting illuminates your child's book, paper or project

Yes, children have "young eyes," but they still need proper lighting. And, don't wait for them to ask us to buy new lamps or brighter light bulbs. These are the same

people that will sit in near-darkness and swear they can see just fine!

How to Be An Effective Homework Helper

The best way to become an effective homework helper is to believe, understand and accept that your child's homework is NOT your homework! You are not responsible for explaining it, getting it done, or turning it in!

A good homework helper makes it possible for a student to become an independent, self-sufficient and highly motivated learner. That's what we all want for our children, right?

YES!

So, how do you do it?

First, the "Don't"s

1. Don't Hover

Parents tell me all of the time that their kids won't do their homework unless they - the parents - are sitting right next to them! This is preposterous! Do you think your child's teacher stands next to your child all day? Of course not! Your child can work independently at school and at home. You aren't going to university with him, are you? He needs to learn how to be an *independent* learner, remember? And, anyway, you have things to do!

If you have already gotten into this habit, slowly break it.

Tell your child, "**Honey, I want to apologize for something.**" (Now, he's listening!) **"I've been sitting here next to you while you do your homework like you can't do it on your own! I KNOW that you can do it without me sitting right here the whole time. Now, don't worry, I'll still be around if you need help. We'll take it one step at a time."**

The first day, get up a few times while your child is doing his homework. When he sees that he can, in fact, do his homework without you right there, you can move on to staying in the room. After a few days, leave the room for a few minutes. Finally, you will be able to come and go as you please!

2. Don't Do It For Them

This is NOT your homework! It is your child's homework, and he should be the one doing it. If you believe that the homework is a waste of time, there is too much of it or he has simply had "enough"- then NO MORE HOMEWORK!

I'll say it another way: **either he does it or it doesn't get done.** It is a bad, bad idea for your child to think that you will do his work and clean up his messes.

3. Don't Pretend You Know Everything

I am a pretty smart parent, but I am not an expert on every topic. Are you? It is

okay to say, "I don't know!" In fact, children respect adults that can admit they don't know everything!

Teach your child how and where to find the information he needs or get him some regular help or maybe call a homework hotline.

4. Don't Let Your Past Experiences Affect Your Child Today

Okay, maybe you absolutely HATED science in school. Perhaps you suffered from test anxiety. Please keep your bad attitude and negative experiences to yourself. For all you know, your child may LOVE science one day or think tests are no problem.

Of course, if you found a way to overcome your science hatred or test anxiety, and/or you understand how your child feels, please share *that*.

Now, the "Do"s

5. Do Set Up A Homework-Friendly Home

Create a home environment that *supports* learning and studying!

6. Do Provide Materials, Tools & Supplies

Do your kids have *everything* they need to do their homework and projects? One way to make certain that you are a homework helper and not a homework doer is to provide your children with the supplies and reference materials they need!

7. Do Teach Them How to Study

Why don't they teach *this subject* in school? Oh, well, one more thing for parents to do! But, teaching your children how to study pays off again and again- in your life and theirs!

8. Do Let Them See *You* Study

"Do as I say, not as I do" never works, does it? If your children see you pick up a book, take a class and do some homework, look up a word in the dictionary- they might do it as well! At least, they might *consider* it!

9. Do Keep Homework in Perspective

Homework should be one, teeny-tiny part of learning, as far as I am concerned. You want your child to love learning and school- not come to hate the whole idea of education because they were forced to do too much homework.

Make a family decision about the role homework will play in your family's life.

Sometimes parents must...

10. Do Save Them

You know your children. You can tell when they are stressed-out, over-loaded and beginning to hate school (oh no!).

Protect them from Homework Overload: write a note to the teacher, be sure they go to bed, and let your children know that you have their best interests at heart.

CHAPTER NINE

DAD'S HOMEWORK

"It's time for another session of homework Jack," called Jack's dad from the family room.

Jack reluctantly put his skateboard away and trudged into his bedroom.

Jack had been having trouble settling into the homework required by all his teachers at high school.

Jack and his parents had come to understand that the only way Jack could do homework unsupervised was in short sessions with a ten-minute break when he lost concentration.

Jack could last for fifteen minutes or so then his eyes would wander off the work and towards the posters on his wall. When that happened Jack knew he had no chance of getting his homework done.

Grandma had told Jack's mum and dad that she always got the boys to do their homework in short bursts.

She knew her job was to get them back for another burst after a physical break away from their desk.

"Wake up Jack," was the call Jack heard from Mr. Hill from the front of the classroom.

"Sorry Sir!" Jack replied.

Jack was having trouble concentrating in the mornings when school got going. He was so tired.

To get a few extra minutes of sleep he chose to miss out on breakfast. This felt so good until he got to recess time and then he had problems focusing on his work.

On the days he skipped breakfast to squeeze in a few extra minutes of sleep Jack felt sluggish by 11am.

He needed his sleep and he was not tired when he was told to go to bed.

Most nights he sent text messages or Facebook messages to his friends until he fell asleep at the screen.

He was frustrated that school started so early.

Jack wondered why school couldn't start at midday. That was a civilised time for a teenage boy to start school Jack thought.

Jacks' parents were getting a bit concerned. Jack was becoming a bit defensive about his life. He kept his bedroom door closed and answered their questions with grunts.

Jack was a bit puzzled himself. His body was changing before his eyes. He was growing fast and he was barely able to keep pace with his thoughts and feelings.

He still loved his mum and dad, but felt they were judging him every time they made a comment or inquired about his life.

Jack's dad noticed it first. He made some comments to Jack's mum; then she began to notice the same thing.

If either needed to have an open conversation with Jack, then it could only happen when Jack was in the passenger seat of the car with a parent with him.

At any other time, Jack felt uncomfortable and confronted. When seated next to his mum or dad in the car on the way to footy training he was relaxed enough to talk. There was no eye contact to unsettle him. He had something else to look at while chatting to his mum or dad. It was so much easier in the car. Jack thought that life at school would be easier if only teachers would walk beside you while having a conversation instead of sitting you across a desk and making you feel like you were a criminal.

Jack loved to visit grandma.

Grandma was always accepting of who he was. She never made discouraging comments about his clothes or school results.

"I suppose you find all that writing and homework boring Jack?" said grandma.

"Yes. I do," said Jack.

"How come you always seem to know the right thing to say Grandma?" asked Jack.

"I did raise your dad and your uncles Jack. They were a lot like you," Gran answered.

"In what ways Gran. I sometimes feel so alien to dad." Said Jack.

"Well. It is a bit like this," said Gran. Most boys have what I call boney bum syndrome. You can't sit still for too long. On top of that, as you get older many of you just can't cope with all that testosterone flowing through your bodies. You go a bit crazy I think," added grandma.

"I have watched your dad and uncles go through something similar. I call it going into a cave. Your dad went in a long way and your uncle Joe not far at all. The more you feel unsettled by life as a teenager the more you withdraw from your family and school life. It is normal, but to you it feels like life has suddenly become weird."

"Life sure does feel weird to me a lot of the time Gran, answered Jack. "Even the cat looks at me strangely some days. And Mum and Dad are so invasive. I can't get any privacy at all."

“Well dear, things will soon change. As if by magic you will see a change in the world; a positive and welcoming change that helps you get along with your parents, teachers and all those other strange people in your life,” said Gran.

Your dad’s life changed when he met your mum at a dance. All of a sudden he had something important to focus on. His attitude to life and his behaviour to Pop and me changed overnight. He became human again. All because he had something special in his life,” Gran added.

“Tell me Jack. What are the things you like the most or the things you want the most right now in your life?” Gran asked.

Jack thought for a moment then shared his innermost thoughts with Gran.

Not long after, Jack noticed that his mum and dad were not on his back so much. He also noticed that he was doing better at school and his teachers seemed a bit more human at long last. He wondered if these changes were anything to do with his chat with Gran. Maybe she was right. At long last he, Jack, was ready to come out of the cave of adolescence.

“Jack, come here and give me a hand with these dishes,” Jack’s dad yelled from the

kitchen sink.

Jack thought his dad had some strange ideas. He never let Jack's mum get a dishwasher. He always went on and on about the time shared doing the dishes being some of the best talk time that a family has.

Sometimes, Jack thought his mum and dad chose the dish wiper in the family according to who had been least communicative over recent days. "Well, maybe," Jack thought, "I hadn't been talking enough to him lately."

"Hey Dad, what are you reading?" Jack asked as his dad let out a little chuckle.

"It's a new Clive Cussler novel. Plenty of action to keep me involved," answered Jack's dad.

Jack liked his dad. They had always shared plenty of time together. Fortunately Jack's dad worked close to home and didn't have to go to many after work meetings, so he was around to share time with the family.

As Jack got older he spent more time with his dad and a bit less time with mum. Jack's mum was ok with it, though sometimes she had a go at their language and the things they shared their time doing.

“Was it really necessary to teach Jack about cleaning a rifle?” Jack’s mum asked one night.

“He is better learning to do things right from me rather than learning by experimenting later on,” was Jack’s dad’s response.

Jack’s dad was a happy person. Jack always picked up on his dad’s positive approach.

Jack couldn’t help but feel that his dad was showing him how to enjoy life.

While they were kidding about and laughing, Jack’s dad was just as likely to use the moment to get them to share cooking a meal or do some difficult homework that had Jack stumped.

Jack sometimes said, “Gee Dad, do we really have to hang out the washing. Isn’t that Mum’s job?”

“Not if we want to show Mum that we love her,” was Jack’s dad’s response. Jack’s dad never got angry over Jack’s protests. He just turned the situation into a game and together they got on with helping Jack’s mum around the house.

"Come and look at this Jack." Jack heard his dad calling from the garage.

As Jack walked into the garage his dad had a huge smile on his face. He could hardly contain his excitement at getting his old motorbike engine working again.

Jack's dad was so excited he gave Jack a hug.

Jack didn't mind his dad's hugs, but only in the privacy of his home.

Jack hoped his dad would show some consideration when out in public. None of Jack's mates had dads who showed their emotions as readily as his dad. It had its pluses but at times was a bit embarrassing.

"Jack's pretty lucky I guess," Jack's mum made the comment to Sally.

"His dad is always in the right place for him," she added.

Jack's mum was having a coffee with her friend Jan while out shopping.

"Jack always has a good role model and a sounding board with his dad. They get along pretty well. Jack's dad is so patient. I think he does remember what it was

like being a teenage boy," she added.

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Other books by Jack Canon

Jack, the boy with a boney bum

Jack's homework wars

The dangerous life of teenage boys

Books by Susie Canon

Mum. You're number one

