

Tips on Homework Help and Academic Skill-Building Activities

For After School Programs

After a long day at work, many parents want to spend time with their children in the evenings without worrying about getting homework done. Some parents with limited English or academic proficiencies feel overwhelmed by their children's need for help with homework. Many children like to finish their homework during their after school program so that they can work on assignments with friends, get help and support from program staff and get homework "out of the way." For these and other reasons, many after school programs offer homework time or homework assistance as part of their program.

After school programs can not only help children get their homework done, they can help children enhance their attitudes towards homework and learning. With well-trained and enthusiastic staff, after school programs can offer engaging skill-building activities as well as an up-beat and encouraging environment for completing homework and mastering the skills involved in assignments. Homework in after school programs can take many different forms including:

- Homework help offered (children know that if they want to do homework, staff will be available to help them)
- Homework time set aside for all children to work on homework (Children without homework can read a book, do research, work on the computer or do other individual academic skill-building activities)
- Homework/Learning area created (Children visit this area when they wish and/or are required to spend a specified amount of time in this area at some point during the afternoon. In this area, children work on homework, participate in tutoring, or take part in games that build academic skills.)

Following are tips and ideas to help you successfully integrate homework into your program and help children get excited about learning.

Create a special academic skill-building area. Work with children to decorate a room or area for homework and academic learning and come up with a creative name for the area. Fill the area with books, learning games, computers, school supplies like paper, pencils, rulers, etc. Put up colorful posters on the walls about books, animals, science, etc. Children can come to this area whenever they like and stay as long as they like, rotate through this area in groups throughout the afternoon, or be directed to spend a specified amount of time in this area each day. If children don't have homework, they can read or participate in skill-building games during the time they spend here.

Set up peer tutoring pairs. Invite older children to sign up to be tutors to younger children. Offer the tutors some basic training and hold regular meetings with them. Be sure that tutoring doesn't interfere with the time tutors need to complete their own homework.

Bring in tutors. Recruit parents, community volunteers, and local college and high school students to serve as tutors. They can help with homework in general or specialize in tutoring a specific subject. Ask tutors to come in at regular times each week and commit to serve in the program for a specified amount of time. Be sure that all tutors receive appropriate training (see "Resources" at the end for information on tutor training). Regularly meet with tutors to discuss children's needs. Assign tutors to individual children or small groups of children so they can get to know each other and learn to work together.

Create a homework sign-off log. Once children finish a homework assignment, have them check in with a staff person or volunteer who can go over their work and put a star or check by their name in a homework log book. Develop a system for letting parents know how much

homework their children have completed each day. Offer monthly prizes for children who've successfully completed a certain number of assignments.

Prepare engaging learning games. Stock your academic area with flashcards, spelling, reading and math games, and computer learning games. Ask local toy stores and computer software companies for donations. Plan spelling and math contests, science experiments, book-writing activities, read-a-thons and other simple learning-focused activities.

Hire or train an academic learning specialist. Select a staff person or volunteer to coordinate homework and academic learning activities in the program. This person can train and direct volunteers, prepare learning games, coordinate tutoring, and help with homework.

Resources for Homework and Learning Activities

Homework and Out-of-School Time Programs: Filling the Need, Finding a Balance by Susan O'Connor and Kate McGuire, NIOST, 1993. This booklet contains basic ideas for integrating homework into an after school program. Available by calling the National Institute on Out-of-School Time at 781-283-2510.

The Homework and Edutainment Club Guide and Resource Kits by the Activities Club, 1998. The guide contains step-by-step instructions for setting up an effective homework program and instructions for hundreds of learning activities supporting different academic subjects. The resource kits contain age-appropriate learning tools and games for different age groups. Available from The Activities Club by calling 617-924-1556.

WEB SITES OFFERING HOMEWORK HELP AND LEARNING GAMES:

<http://www.ed.gov/free> – Free on-line resources on all academic subjects submitted by 35 different federal agencies

<http://www.ash.udel.edu/ash/index.html> – Alphabet Superhighway offers fun games and learning activities

<http://www.tristate.pgh.net/~pinch13> – B.J. Pinchbeck's Homework Helper has links to many sites offering help on different homework subjects

<http://www.startribune.com/stonline/html/specila/homework> – The Homework Help site offers links and opportunities to ask homework questions

Science Activities (the following are available by calling School-Age Notes at 1-800-410-9780)

Science Arts: Discovering Science Through Art Experiences by MaryAnn Kohl and Jean Potter

Showy Science: Exciting Hands-On Activities That Explore the World Around Us by Hy Kim

The Kids' Nature Book: 365 Indoor/Outdoor Activities and Experiences by Susan Milord

Science in Seconds for Kids: Over 100 Experiments You Can Do in Ten Minutes or Less by Jean Potter

Literacy Activities and Tutoring Tips

<http://www.nwrel.org/LEARNS> – The LEARNS website offers information and ideas on promoting reading and literacy and effectively training tutors.

<http://www.ed.gov/americanreads> – The America Reads website offers resources, links and publications to promote literacy as well as information on tutor training.