



Homework Help May Force Parents To Refresh School Skills

Your fifth grader brings home math homework and asks for your assistance. The class is up to multiplying fractions, and it's been years since you've done this type of work. Never mind numerators and denominators, the most you know about fractions at this point is how a pizza is cut into eight slices. What are you going to do when your child is a teenager bringing home even harder homework?

Although they are routinely the first people students ask for homework help, many parents confess they are flummoxed by algebra equations and can't tell a preposition from a participle. As when they were students or not, lack of practice means parents may no longer recall the lessons of their youth.

In a 2010 Encyclopedia Britannica survey, researchers tested 500 British parents who had children under the age of 16 at the time. The parents took a quiz based on lessons studied for General Certificate of Secondary Education, or

GCSE, exams. The survey found that mothers struggled, answering 12.3 percent of questions correctly, while



Homework time often becomes a family affair. Many parents are finding they need to brush up on basic skills to offer adequate assistance.

fathers (27.8 percent) did not fare much better.

Many North American parents struggle to help their students with homework as well. Immigrant parents have the most difficulty, likely due to language barriers. In addition, immigrant parents were likely schooled in different education systems in another part of the world, making homework assignments seem foreign even for those parents who speak English well. Parents who understand the homework may be confusing their children by assisting them in a manner that is inconsistent with the way the students are now being taught. So what is a parent to do?

Some school districts are aware of the problem and provide solutions. Jill I., a parent in New York, says

that her son's school sends home a parental instruction book that explains the basics behind subject matter and illustrates how to explain it to children. Other parents are left floundering to figure out the best way to be of assistance to their kids. These are some of the steps they can take.

* Contact the teacher and find out if you can purchase or borrow a copy of the teacher's edition of the textbook. This way you can keep abreast of the lessons and instruct in the same way that the lessons are being taught in school. If a book is not available, find out if instructional materials can be assembled to assist you in mastering the concepts.

* Log online to search for the subject matter and refresh your memory. Many teachers or experts volunteer information online to help educate students (and parents) about math, science, reading, and other subjects. Parents looking to double-check their math and

science work can use a Web site like Wolfram Alpha, which is a computational knowledge engine.

* Hire a tutor if you find you're doing more harm than good when assisting with homework. If lack of personal knowledge about the homework or simple frustration over your child's inability to grasp the lessons is making homework time unbearable, and ending in a

shouting match, consider the use of a tutor. Students a few years older than your child might be able to help with homework because it is more fresh in their minds. Plus, your child may feel less pressure when learning from a peer or older sibling.

The "MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience," a 2007 survey which polled teachers, students and par-

ents, found that almost everyone believed in the value of homework. Homework was viewed as an essential part of student learning. Because it is an integral part of a child's learning experience, it behooves parents to find ways to assist with homework questions, no matter the method.

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