

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: Every night is a battle to get my 5th grade son to do his homework. I get so frustrated and angry; it ruins the night for the whole family. Any suggestions?

ANSWER: I firmly believe that struggles with children are opportunities for God to transform parents. Sadly, we parents usually don't want, nor do we often seize these opportunities. Here is an **opportunity** for you to understand and empathize with the heart of God. We are God's children. We wound him deeply by our refusal to live how we should. Our rebellion springs out of childish defiance and selfishness. There are many reasons why we are called "children" of God. One of the opportunities God provides for parents is to watch our own sinful foolishness lived out in the actions and attitudes of our children. In an event as common as battling over homework, God gives parents an opportunity for reflection and repentance.

But, that's not really what you wanted to hear, I know. You want a practical solution. Nothing wrong with that! However, if that were all I would offer you, a "quick fix", I would have missed an opportunity too.

A question: In the long-term scheme of life, which would you rather have: The ability to make your son do his homework, or a son who chooses to do his homework? Don't fall into the trap that says homework is YOUR responsibility. Your job (like God) is to provide the OPPORTUNITY to do the right thing—in this case, homework. The following approach works with **most** kids (My answer assumes the problem is defiance and non-compliance, not a learning disability or mental disorder.):

1. Find a **consistent** time and place without distractions. Provide a glass of water, his school books, and tell your son **calmly and compassionately (your mood is critical)**: "There are two ways to learn. You can sit and just think about your homework, or you can do your homework. I have provided the next hour (half-hour, whatever) for you to do one or the other. You can choose. If you choose to just think about your homework, that's OK, but you have to stay here at the table for the whole time. If you choose to do your homework, that's OK too. Which do you think you will choose to do tonight?"
2. If your son chooses to just sit and think about his homework, say something like: "I hope YOU can get your teacher to go along with your choice." (No sarcasm or anger.) Then leave.
3. Collaborate with his teacher, so he/she can make the consequence of him just thinking about his homework as undesirable as possible.
4. If your son genuinely needs help with his homework, let HIM ask for it. Help only in limited ways where the result is clearly seen. Refrain from checking over

his entire homework every night. Your goal should be to move him to a place where he can check his own work. Think: Life skill!

5. This approach frees you from being the “bad guy.” When he makes the choice to just sit and think, commiserate, empathize, but don’t rescue or do any “I-told-you-so’s.” Let him reap the consequences of his choice. (I know this is hard.)

By letting your son own the problem, you are teaching a lesson for life. By letting him choose, you are staying out of a power struggle. By involving the teacher, you are being wise. By allowing him to endure the consequences, you will help him remember. By not rescuing him, you are telling him that you have confidence that he can figure it out! By starting this approach early in life, you will prepare him for the truly important decisions in adolescence and adulthood.

This is a “Love and Logic”* approach to the problem. I believe it is also a Biblical approach. God will not make us do the right thing. He lets us have the freedom to choose to do good, and gives us his Spirit to help. In this world, God rarely spares us the consequences of poor choices. He forgives, empathizes, provides strength, and gives more opportunities to do the right thing.

By the time your child reaches 3rd or 4th grade, you should pretty much be out of the homework business. Your child should be checking his own work, scheduling long term projects on his calendar, remembering his books and materials, and be self-motivating (Such behavior assumes no learning disabilities or attention disorders, etc.). If you suspect a learning disability or mental disorder, seek professional testing.

By the way, if you have a child with a learning disability, your goal should still be to have him/her become as independent as possible with as few accommodations and modifications as possible.

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*If you want to read more about “Love and Logic” parenting, read *Parenting with Love and Logic* by Jim Fay and Foster Cline