



How to help your kid with homework—

BY PERSONALITY TYPE



It's astounding, really, how much parent-kid tension can be brought on by a few math worksheets or reading assignments. Gauging your kid's homework personality, says Ann Dolin, founder of Washington, DC's Educational Connections Tutoring, can help get you past the hump.

MS. DISORGANIZED

This is the kid who doesn't bring the right book home, or does her homework but can't find it the next day. "A lot of parents will see this as something willful," says Dolin. "But a lot of times, it's just that the child's executive functioning isn't well developed yet. Accepting that will go a long way." Don't take over, but create space for her to get herself together: a weekly family "clean sweep," for example, during which she empties out her backpack while you tackle the junk drawer. "Scattered backpack, scattered mind," says Dolin.

THE RUSHER

He whips through his homework in record time, scattering easy mistakes and skimping on detail. Check his work? Never! He has places to go. "Saying 'Slow down!' won't work,"

says Dolin. Instead, she institutes a set period (say, the recommended 10 minutes per grade level) of Dedicated Homework Time. "Tell him, 'If you finish, you can work ahead, you can do your reading, you can do math facts on the computer, but this block is set aside for schoolwork.'" There's less incentive to rush—and less friction between the two of you.

THE PROCRASTINATOR

She can't find a pencil; she's cold; she needs a drink of water. These kids are not just avoiding work. "Sometimes they feel overwhelmed and underprepared," says Dolin. Encourage her to set small goals for herself, allowing a short break after: working through two math problems, for example, or just the easy ones. Timers may also help. "She can set it and say, 'Ten minutes, then I can take a break,'" says Dolin. Often, once this kid gets started, she'll go on through like a champ.

THE DAYDREAMER OR FIDGETY KID

These kids—problems self-explanatory—also do great with a timer. Try breaking up their homework into short segments of no more than 20 minutes and letting them move locations for each. "Fidgety kids

also often do things that really annoy parents and teachers, like rocking in their chairs or clicking mechanical pencils," says Dolin. "The instinct is to say, 'Stop that!' But allow them to fidget. They need to get that energy out."

MR. FRUSTRATED

If reading = rage or math = major drama in your house, it's time to put on the brakes. "Nobody can think clearly in the middle of the meltdown," says Dolin. "That's when parents need to disengage. Say, 'I'm going to go check my email. Come find me when you want to get started again.'" For Round 2, resist telling your kid how to tackle his problem, advises Dolin. "Say, 'Do you have an example? Do you have notes on this? Is it on another worksheet?'" she says. "You're teaching them the skill of independence. The more you hover, the worse the outcome." ■



"I have to get myself dressed and ready first before I can actually deal with anyone else. I typically go straight to the shower, get myself pulled together, and then—only once I know I could walk out the door within two minutes—I can attend to the kids. Because at that point, anything can happen."
—Merrill Stubbs, mom of two and Food52 cofounder