

When Your Child Keeps Putting Homework Off: Breaking the Procrastination Cycle

Homework procrastination can look like defiance, but often the more useful question is what is making it hard to begin. A child may be unsure what to do first, overwhelmed by a large assignment, distracted by competing activities, tired, or accustomed to needing repeated adult prompting. Start by making the first step visible and small. Instead of saying, “Go do your homework,” ask your child to name the assignment, gather the materials, and choose one short starting task. A predictable time and place can reduce the number of decisions needed before work begins. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a regular homework location and routine and advises parents to support the work without taking responsibility for doing it.¹ If starting is still difficult, use a brief transition cue such as a ten-minute warning, then a timer for a short work interval. Break long assignments into pieces that can be checked off. Executive-function skills support planning, focus, working memory, and self-regulation, and these skills develop through practice rather than by adults permanently taking over the task.² AAP guidance also notes that checklists, timers, a quiet workspace, and parental supervision can help children overcome homework problems.³ The goal is not to eliminate every reminder overnight. It is to transfer responsibility gradually. Give one clear prompt, let the child complete the next step, and recognize specific follow-through: “You opened the assignment and started before I reminded you again.” If procrastination is persistent across subjects, causes nightly conflict, or results in unfinished work despite consistent routines, bring examples to the teacher and ask what is happening at school as well as at home.

Did You Know?

- ✓ The AAP recommends a regular time and place for homework and says parents should support the work without doing it for the child.¹
- ✓ Harvard’s Center on the Developing Child explains that executive-function skills help children plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and manage tasks.²
- ✓ AAP back-to-school guidance recommends tools such as checklists, timers, quiet workspaces, and supervision when children need help organizing homework.³

Research Sources

- [1. American Academy of Pediatrics. “Developing Good Homework Habits.” HealthyChildren.org.](#)
- [2. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. “A Guide to Executive Function.”](#)
- [3. American Academy of Pediatrics. “Back-to-School Tips for Families.” HealthyChildren.org.](#)

Ten-Minute Start-the-Work Plan

Use this page when homework keeps getting delayed. The goal is to make starting smaller and more independent.

Child's name: _____

Date: _____

Assignment: _____

Due date: _____

1. Name the Assignment - About 2 Minutes

Name exactly what needs to be done before discussing how long it will take.

Assignment: _____ Due: _____

2. Make the First Step Small - About 2 Minutes

Turn the assignment into one action that can begin immediately.

First step: _____

3. Set One Work Interval - About 2 Minutes

Choose a realistic work interval and a brief planned break if needed.

Work for _____ minutes Break for _____ minutes

4. Remove One Barrier - About 2 Minutes

Identify one distraction, missing material, or uncertainty that blocks starting.

Barrier: _____ Fix: _____

5. Transfer Responsibility - About 2 Minutes

End by naming the next step your child will handle.

What Parents Can Say: "You got started. Keep going with the next step."