



Talking with kids about
HOMework





HOMework

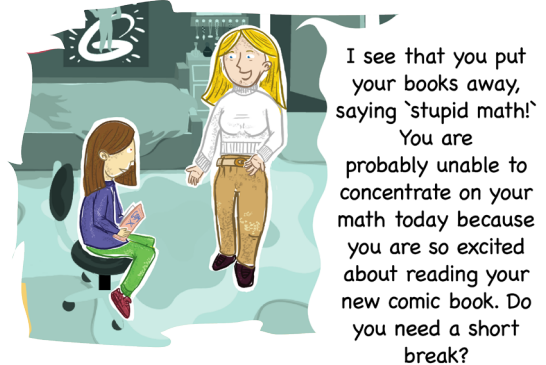
Following a long day in school, Mariyam, your 9-year old daughter, is only reluctantly persuaded to finish her homework. After trying for a little while and failing to catch on, she is totally frustrated and wants to quit¹.

Who is not familiar with this situation? Homework problems are frequently the number one conflict issue in many families. The parents who wish to encourage and further their children, want them to complete their homework properly. Homework assignments are considered important learning opportunities which one's children must not forego. However, the students are often unwilling to devote much time on academic learning outside of school. They may not quite comprehend the assignments and what they are supposed to do. Moreover, they are unable to ask for assistance if both parents are at work, whereas the parents who want to help quickly turn into "assistant teachers". Thus, they control, remind and impose sanctions on their children out of concern that the assignments might otherwise not be finished, or done incorrectly. How should the parents act in such a situation?

Choose from among the following possible reactions and see how things might continue and what kinds of suggestions we have for you!

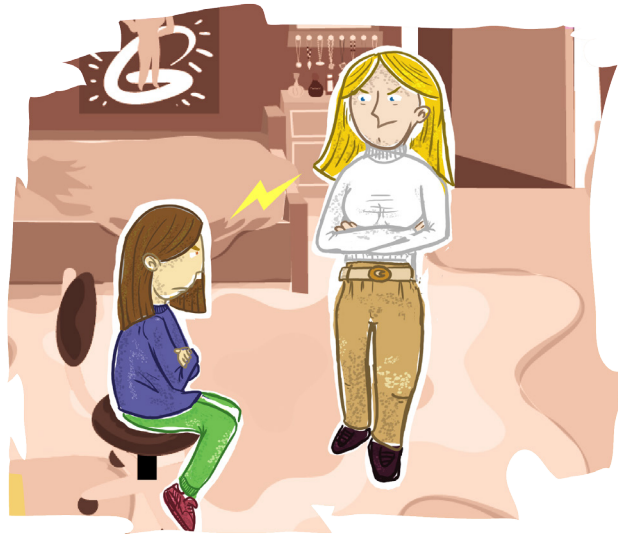


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You will find general tips and hints for dealing with "homework" at the end of the document on [page 6](#).



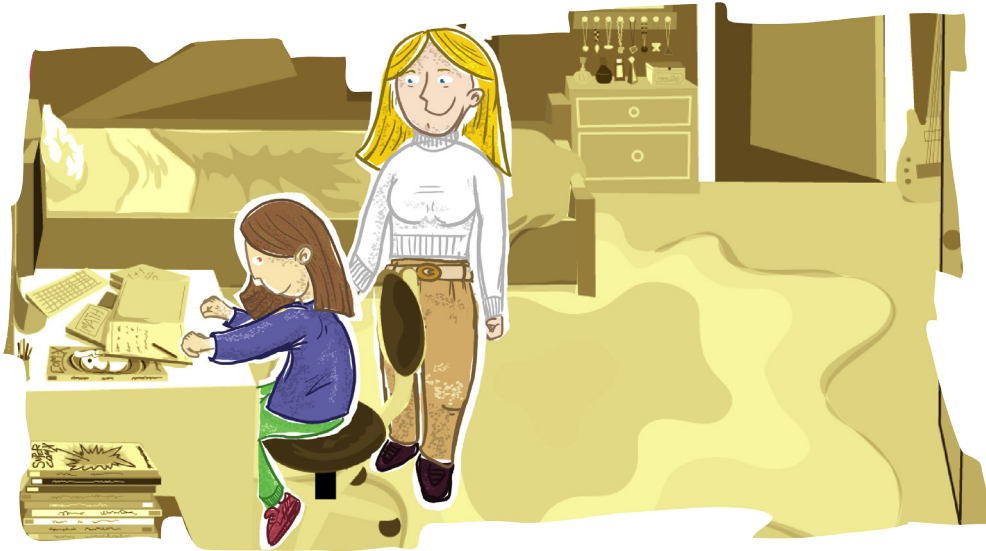
If you react this way, as her mother, the conflict is inevitable. Mariyam is getting nowhere with her homework assignments and, on top of it, she finds herself faced with your reproaches. She feels misunderstood, whereas you will probably resent her negative attitude and reluctance. This conflict could be avoided if you would attempt to counter Mariyam's anger with "open communication". Read more about open communication on [page 4](#).

How can we "open up" our communication?

First: Show your child what you have understood or gleaned from her message. Refrain from interpreting her manner of speaking and acting. Just provide feedback about what you have heard or seen.

Second: You must make an effort to openly communicate your own feelings, thoughts, wishes and needs. Be careful, do not express them in an implicit way.

Third: Allow sufficient time for dialogs and communication in general, thus demonstrating to your child: "You are important to me. I am interested in you, your thoughts, emotions, your life." This fosters a deep feeling of acceptance and supports your child's self-confidence.



With this reaction, you are attempting to openly demonstrate your perceptions. You recognize that Mariyam is distracted, but you do not evaluate and criticize her behavior. This avoids her feeling misunderstood and devalued. The short break may either motivate your daughter to quickly complete her assignments, or you will have to find another suitable solution together.

The important thing is that you both remain engaged in a positive interaction. Thus, your child will understand that she is understood and accepted. She will feel empowered to share her perceptions and feelings without fearing that she may be condemned or not loved. When you communicate openly with your child, you strengthen her self-worth. Knowing about her own feelings and thoughts will enable your daughter to contemplate and evaluate herself critically at times. Thus, she will be unconstrained by what others may think of her. Personalities with strong identities are of critical importance and a prerequisite for functioning democracies.

Read more about open communication on [page 4](#).

Open communication

Communication does not just occur with words. We also communicate nonverbally with body language (facial expressions, posture, gestures). Moreover, voice emphasis also influences how people understand our message.

Furthermore, the 4 different aspects of a message (information, relationship, appeal and self-revelation) must be considered when trying to communicate successfully.

Conclusion: it is hardly easy to transmit a message in the way the sender (in this case Mariyam), wants to be understood, and it is even more difficult for the receiver to decode its intended meaning, as evidenced by the inability of Mariyam's mother to comprehend her daughter's communication.

Thus, it is important to "open up" our communication. Open communication allows us to render the implicit aspects of a message more explicit, and it ensures that we are not going to misunderstand each other. At times, even the senders may not know the true intention of a communicated message or behavior. For instance, babies and toddlers who are unable to cope with their own feelings, inner conditions and needs often lack the ability to communicate them clearly. Therefore, it behoves the parents or other adults to find out for themselves (Examples: Is the child ill or hungry? Is anything causing him/her pain or is he/she just tired?). The situation with the 9-year old girl would seem to suggest that she is not fully aware of her needs. Thus, it is your parental challenge to try to understand your children. Your efforts with open communication may help to clarify the implicit aspects of their message.

How can we "open up" our communication?

First: Show your children what you have understood or gleaned from their message. Refrain from interpreting their articulations and acting. Just provide feedback based on what you have heard or seen.

Second: You also need to openly communicate your own feelings, thoughts, wishes and needs. Careful, do not express them in an implicit way.

Third: Allow sufficient time for dialogs and communication in general. Thus, you demonstrate to your child "You are important to me. I am interested in you, your thoughts, emotions, and your life." This fosters a deep feeling of being accepted and supports the self-confidence of your child.

For practice opportunities with open communication, go on reading on [page 5](#).

Training for open communication

Here you will find different daily life situations with children. In each case, two different parental reactions are given. Imagine how the interaction would continue pursuant to the stated parental reaction, and write it down.

Then, reflect on the interactions with the help of the following questions: Which parental reaction leads to a better understanding of the child and his/her situation? How can the child find a solution for his/her problem/situation? How can the parent guide the child through his/her feelings, needs? Which parental reaction leads to a conflict?

At dinner²

4-year old Samantha does not want to eat. She just pecks in her potatoes.

A: "Samantha, stop being such a drama queen! Eat your potatoes, or you will go to bed without a bedtime story!" The mother speaks loudly, with a raised warning finger.	B: "I can see that you're just pecking in your food and looking at your plate. You also said that you don't want anything. I suppose you are just tired and not hungry. Am I right?"
How would this interaction continue? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	How would this interaction continue? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Getting up in the morning³

10-year old Olivia remains in bed and explains: "I can't go to school today." After three wake-up calls, she complains: "Leave me alone! It's painful!"

A: "You don't seem ill, so get out of your bed! We also have to work, even when we don't feel like it."	B: (Imagine a reaction in an open communication situation: What would the mother say?) <hr/> <hr/>
How would this interaction continue? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	How would this interaction continue? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Meal time

Steve is 14 years old. For two weeks now, he has been refusing to eat dinner with the rest of his family, affirming: "I'm not hungry!" Now, his father wants him to change this behavior.

A: "As long as you live with us in our house, you have to abide by our rules. And one of the rules states that we're eating dinner together. Now, come join us and take your place at the table!"	B: (Imagine a reaction in an open communication situation: What would the father say?) <hr/> <hr/>
How would this interaction continue? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	How would this interaction continue? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Tips and tricks for dealing with the controversial issues of "homework"

Delegate responsibility! Homework assignments are a matter between teachers and students. As parents, you may often unknowingly exert pressure on your children because you feel responsible for their professional future and everything related to it. Do not get involved in a power struggle, delegate the responsibility for completing the homework assignments to your children. This way, they learn to assume responsibility for their actions and become more self-confident in the process. Responsible conduct and action is vitally important for your children as future, autonomous citizens in a democratic society.

When homework assignments take too long... This can occur for various reasons. Perhaps the assignments are unclear, or the students misunderstood something. However, children at times seek the helpful attention of their parents, realizing that "when I have difficulties, my parents will come and devote their time and attention to me." Nevertheless, many children are overwhelmed with homework and thus become discouraged and frustrated. Try to figure out the cause for excessive amounts of time spent on homework assignments, then act accordingly.

Little breaks are essential! If you feel that your children seem frequently frustrated with homework assignments or overwhelmed with a multitude of tasks without a work plan, you should develop a task schedule together with your children. Do not overestimate their ability to concentrate and include short breaks into your children's work schedule.

Homework as a venue for other conflicts? Do your children feel unjustly treated by their teachers? Is there trouble in school? Do your children feel misunderstood? Issues with homework can also arise for other reasons. Take the time to understand your children's feelings and take them seriously. You can find useful, pertinent suggestions and tips under the heading "open communication" on [page 4](#).

Speak with the teachers of your children! If you feel that your children require too much time for their homework, or if there are other issues with homework assignments, contact their teachers directly and discuss your questions and issues in a timely manner. Thus, uncertainties can be addressed before your children fail in despair at their tasks and greater conflicts arise at home.

„Talking with kids about homework” is based on the following references:

¹ Heueck-Mauss, Doris. 2016. *So rede ich richtig mit meinem Kind: Wie Worte wirken: Konflikte fair lösen: Stressfreier erziehen*. Hannover: Humboldt, 33 ff.

² Heueck-Mauss, Doris. 2016. *So rede ich richtig mit meinem Kind: Wie Worte wirken: Konflikte fair lösen: Stressfreier erziehen*. Hannover: Humboldt, 32.

³ Heueck-Mauss, Doris. 2016. *So rede ich richtig mit meinem Kind: Wie Worte wirken: Konflikte fair lösen: Stressfreier erziehen*. Hannover: Humboldt, 44.

Braun, Liselotte. 2017. *„Knatsch bei den Hausaufgaben- das muss nicht sein.» Das Schweizer Elternmagazin Fritz und Fränzi*, April, 18-19.

Council of Europe. 2016. *Competences For Democratic Culture. Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 41 f.

Heueck-Mauss, Doris. 2016. *So rede ich richtig mit meinem Kind: Wie Worte wirken: Konflikte fair lösen: Stressfreier erziehen*. Hannover: Humboldt, 25 ff.