

# SMART PARENT STRATEGIES

## For Healing Homework with Small Children



### *1. Decrease after-school run-around.*

Today, the increased pressure placed on kids in school means there is less energy left after-school.

Children cannot do as many after-school activities as were possible a decade or even five years ago. The increased pressure on their day takes from the energy and focus they might have used for a sport, music lesson or language.

Be careful to monitor what your child's real load is like rather than using your own childhood memories as the reference point.

If your kids are stressed and resisting homework try to reduce the after-school activities and run-around. When you do this you are training your children in healthy self-regulation.

When we are stressed the healthy response is NOT to get more manic and DO more but to slow everything down and do less so our systems can recover. Doing this teaches your kids an important life skill and helps them to self-regulate their stress.



If we force children beyond their coping limits they lose their capacity to engage during the school day. Reduce activities and leave slack in the bow.

## *2. ALWAYS check in with kids about their day.*

After that first hug, “How was your day?” or “Tell me about your day.”

- i. What was the biggest thing that happened for you today?
- ii. Were there any bumpy bits in your day that need a hug?
- iii. How are you feeling today?

These questions asked with genuine concern and care are essential to monitor their ongoing wellbeing. This can also cue you to the mood you will be encountering at homework time.

## *3. Make HOMECOMING low stress.*

Beyond putting their bag away, the time right after school should be free of tasks and allow children a lot of free choice in what they do.

THIS is the time to allow them to unwind by moodling and playing. DON'T force homework on them as soon as they come in the door. ***Timing is everything.***

## *4. Have a day-to-day routine that is predicable and unhurried.*

If dinner is at a regular time, followed by baths etc that means that these activities are habits in the automatic zone and don't take up your child's brain power. If you are haggling over bath and bed times your chances of getting homework done are low!

### *5. Make homework part of the WINDING DOWN process of the day.*

This is the part of the day where you turn on some gentle, soothing music; light a candle and generally begin to slow the pace and create the VIBE.

### *6. Use Gentle Interruption rather than Force.*

Immediately post-dinner make sure there are no games, TV or computers running while you “set up” the table and the space. When children are small homework is best done around the table as a family.

Have a name for this time together that is NOT homework. One family I know calls it “Together time.” Rather than hurrying, stressing and commanding be sure to GENTLY interrupt them for homework. Ie: <http://www.powerfulmother.com/two-secrets-powerful-mothers-know/>



### *7. Make Homework a time of Sensory Nourishment.*

#### a. SMELL:

If you enjoy incense, light some. If not, an oil burner with some Lavender or Rose oil burning will help soothe frayed nerves and signal wind down time.

#### b. SOUND:

Gentle music: singing bowls, flutes, chimes...any ambient music without a lot of singing will help lower anxiety and create a gentle background soothing.

If you don't have any you could stream [www.pandora.com/ambient](http://www.pandora.com/ambient) radio

#### c. SIGHT:

Set up the space with a nice cloth. Be sure you have a special pen holder, pretty or fun accessories that *only come out* at this time.

d. SNACKS:

Make sure there are special snacks and treats that, again, *only come out* as part of this time.

e. SOOTHE:

Ensure children are physically comfortable.

In winter make sure they are warm: slippers, hot water bottles, dressing gowns. In summer that there is a fan blowing and the room is cool.

### 9. *Keep interactions PLEASANT.*

Remain pleasant during this time. This means managing our own moods so we don't get snappy or stressed when there is difficulty.

If your child is struggling affirm their intelligence and offer gentle support. Monitor your own sense of hopelessness or frustration and keep these in check. Your optimism about outcomes and possibility assist your child immensely.

Getting frustrated and uptight when THEY are anxious confirms for them that their difficulty is a BIG problem.

Learning is always a process of going from what we don't know to what we do. We can *all* make it if the steps are there.



### *10. When all else fails STAY CALM.*

Don't get stressed when your child has difficulty.

Remain calm, affirm their intelligence and offer gentle support.

If you have difficulty with this have a look at <http://www.powerfulmother.com/the-learning-mother/> for some help.

### *11. BUILD IN natural, unheralded rewards.*

This is particularly important if a teacher or peer is giving them negative feedback at school.

A hug or family celebration when a task is completed.

You can gently provide a hand or a shoulder rub when they are struggling with focus.

These supports help your child begin to associate learning with enjoyment and relaxation.

### *12. WRAP IT UP with another WIND DOWN.*

Punctuate the end of homework with a hot chocolate, Milo or something enjoyable.

Put story time AFTER homework so that you continue the sense of pleasure in winding down a good day and moving naturally towards sleep.

It is important that this is a gentle, unpressured experience with a lot of positive feedback, interest and affirmation for what they are doing.

When you build in this type of relational and sensory reward and enjoyment you are teaching your child to UNCONSCIOUSLY associate learning with pleasure, relaxation and reward.

This is extra work for parents and mothers in particular, but it will actively mitigate the stress of increased learning demands children now face.

Monotony is the death of living. Asking:

“How can I make this a pleasant and joyful part of my child's living, despite the work to be done,” can help your own creativity come forth.

Refusing to succumb to monotony is an essential life skill.

Creating your OWN way means you are teaching your child to resist monotony and to live well.

Rewards, calm, gentleness and enjoyment. Whenever we structure these into life, no matter the task, life gets better.

Use your power to create a positive learning space in your home.



This is enough.

Gentle steps.

c. Dr. K. Thomas [www.powerfulmother.com](http://www.powerfulmother.com)

Photocredits (in order): c. Depositphotos/ Murdocksimages; Shalamov. c. K. Thomas; P. D. Corning; K.Thomas.