

Homework hell

Does homework cause stress in your family? You're not alone.

In a recent survey of 5,000 adults conducted by Statistics Canada and sponsored by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), three quarters of parents said that homework had been a source of stress in their households. But interestingly an overwhelming majority also said they thought that the amount of homework was appropriate. In another recent survey, 100,000 students in Grades 7 to 12 in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reported other forms of homework stress: only 20% said they didn't need help with their homework and over half said they had trouble finishing homework because it was too difficult. Sixty one per cent of the students in grades 7 and 8 and 36% of the Grade 8 to 12 students said that they looked to their parents for help with the homework.

The CCL survey also found that parents born inside Canada, parents without high school diplomas and parents in the top income bracket (\$100,000 or more) were all more likely report homework-related stress in their households. Parents born outside Canada were less than half as likely as Canadian-born parents to report homework stress.

Impact of homework different in elementary and secondary school

Recent books by Sarah Bennett (*The Case Against Homework: How Homework Is Hurting Our Children*) and Alfie Kohn (*The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing*) have been absolute in their condemnation of homework. Both authors make the case that there is little or no proof that homework improves students' chances for success in school.

On the other hand, the CCL points to a number of studies that show homework has a positive effect on grades, test scores and attitudes toward formal learning, and that students who are assigned homework outperform those who are not.

Where all of them seem to agree, is that the difference lies between homework in high school and homework for elementary school students. While the grades and overall success rate of high school students appear to be improved with homework, there is much less proof that homework has a positive impact on elementary students. There is less effect on marks, and homework in elementary school may even have a negative impact on academic performance and attitudes toward learning for younger students.

Advice to help with homework hell

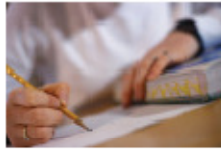
There is little evidence to show that helping your child do the homework improves her or his chances for success. But there is lots of evidence to show that being supportive, letting your child know you think school is important and talking to your child about school makes a difference. Sometimes just getting the student to tell you about the homework helps them to organize themselves and be clearer about what they have to accomplish.

If, after a real effort, the homework is too difficult for the student, then either your child or you should let the teacher know. If your child is doing what seems like an unreasonable amount of homework, it is important to talk to the teacher about it. Homework may be a good topic for a school council meeting, where parents can discuss the school's

see "Homework hell". page 2

"Homework hell", cont. from page 1

policy and perhaps have input into limiting the amount of homework, or encouraging the



school to coordinate assignments so that students aren't loaded up with homework from different classes or during exam periods.

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