

Q & A

Homework Hassles

**Q:** I work all day, and my 14-year-old daughter won't do homework while she is at home alone. She claims she studies, but I know she really watches TV or plays on the computer. How can I motivate her when I'm not there?

*Mary Lou Maroney, Holbrook, MA*

**A:** "Set your expectations and make it clear that they need to be met by a certain deadline or else there will be consequences," says Eileen Huntington, mother of two, teacher and cofounder of the Huntington Learning Center, a supplemental instruction program.

Create a time chart, breaking down the work that needs to be done into half-hour increments. "Review the chart once you get home to see if your daughter has completed everything," Huntington says.

If she finishes everything, reward her with praise or allow her to stay up to watch one more television program. If she doesn't complete her work, take away some of her privileges.

"The bigger issue here is handling responsibility and being able to do so independently," says Huntington. "This is a skill that will be vital in higher education and beyond."



Making Discipline Work

If your way of discipline doesn't seem to be working, read on.

**Method Yelling.** You raise your voice so your child knows you "mean business."

**Why it's ineffective** Though it's hard not to yell when frustration builds, yelling can make a child fearful.

"The goal of discipline is to help your child understand the negative consequences of bad behavior and the positive consequences of good behavior," says Kathy Reschke, Ph.D., assistant professor of human development and family science at Ohio State University in Columbus. That reasoning isn't likely to take place in the midst of yelling.

It's also ineffective when you yell so much that the shock value wears off. If your tone isn't special, a child won't pay attention.

**What to do instead** Get your child's attention by gently touching her shoulder or saying her name until she makes eye contact. "Kids pick up subtleties in our voices and faces," says Dr. Reschke. "Believe it or not, it doesn't take a loud voice to convince them that you're serious."

**Method Time-out.** Sending your child to his room for a set time.

**Why it's ineffective** Your child may view his room or wherever you send him as a good place to be, making the supposed punishment a reward. More importantly, says Dr. Reschke, a time-out doesn't really address the problem at hand.

**What to do instead** Talk to your child about his behavior and enforce relevant and appropriate consequences. However, if you're particularly angry, or your child is, sending him to his room for a few minutes gives you both time to regain control of emotions.

**Method Making threats.** This includes telling a dawdling child that you'll leave without him if he isn't ready in five minutes.

**Why it's ineffective** You've never left without him and you never will—and he knows it.

**What to do instead** "Promises directly related to the behavior are more effective than threats," says Dr. Reschke. For example, if your child won't let his brother have a turn at the video game they're playing, tell him that if he doesn't behave, he'll lose video game privileges for the next day.

*Lori Murray*

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