

# Parents and the Tween's Brain-Grades 3-5

## Top 10 Homework Tips

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I AM FINDING IT DIFFICULT  
TO CONCENTRATE BUT I  
AM NOT SURE WHY



Teach children that their brain is a muscle that can be strengthened when challenged. This not only gives them hope for improvement, but it also puts them back in the driver's seat with their learning.



1. **Provide a “screen free” environment during homework time.** Provide a quiet, distraction-free area during homework time. In addition, remove televisions and computers from the bedroom. Research suggests having televisions and computers in children’s bedrooms lowers test scores, increases apathy, increases risk for substance use, and interrupts sleep.

2. **Ownership of homework shifts.** This is like walking a tightrope as parents decide how much to get involved and help with homework; versus allowing the child to make mistakes and learn from them. Natural consequences help teach good study skills but if you are running into problems repeatedly, contact the teacher for guidance about any concerns. Although you are an expert on your own child, teachers have taught hundreds, if not thousands, of students over time in your child’s age group- seek their guidance and expertise when concerned.

3. **Focus on process, not product.** Research shows that when you focus on the process and the act of working through a challenge, this will decrease learned helplessness and increase internal motivation (Bronson & Merryman, 2009). Avoid praise such as “You’re smart!” Carol Dweck who performed a research study on kids and praise found that “...frequently-praised children [for being “smart”] get more competitive and more interested in tearing others down. Image-maintenance becomes their primary concern” (2009). They become fearful of failure and will simply not complete a task or they might procrastinate due to “saving face” instead of risking embarrassment or disappointment. Praising your child for their *efforts* is preferred. That way if they fail a task, instead of thinking “I’m stupid”, they will think “Maybe I’ll get it right next time”. This teaches persistence over performance.

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Unlike adults, losing sleep can have an exponential impact on a child's brain development. Because children's brains are still growing, kids ages 5-10 need 10-11 hours of sleep a night! Less than that may impact mood, thinking and reactions to daily stressors.

4. **Get personal!** Kids this age (especially 3<sup>rd</sup> graders) love rules, laws, and order. Fairness is a big topic. At this age they have absorbed much more information about the world, yet it is still important to bring it back down to how it relates to them. For example, if there is an assignment about laws or the legal system, ask them if they think homework should be against the law. Ask why or why not? At this age, kids still learn best with concrete experiences and examples.

5. **Dig a little deeper.** Kids this age will soak up information quickly but need your help in order to reflect upon the topics on a deeper level. Responding to their questions with "Well, what do you think will happen next?" encourages critical thinking. In addition, ask them to reflect on what they learned at school.

6. **Plan ahead!** Planning ahead may still be a challenge for your tween. Helping them chart tests and project due dates on a large calendar or whiteboard is incredibly helpful. As their frontal lobe develops (in charge of organization and planning), they need you to model these skills.

7. **Ask your child to state his/her plan ahead of time.** Research shows that if your child can tell you ahead of time what the goal is for after school homework and studying tasks, he/she will more likely to complete the task.

8. **The final product needs to represent your child's work.** As fun and interesting the projects are, try not to take over and complete the project yourself. This will allow the teacher to authentically assess the work.

9. **Sufficient sleep is paramount!** Kids are getting one hour of sleep less a night than they did thirty years ago (Bronson & Merryman, 2009). "Because children's brains are a work in progress until the age of 21[and beyond], and because much of that work is done while a child is asleep, this lost hour appears to have an exponential impact on children that it simply doesn't have on adults" (2009).

10. **Exercise increases brain connectivity.** It is recommended kids exercise at least 60 minutes a day, preferably outside. Exercise produces BDNF, which is a type of "miracle grow" for the brain (Medina, 2008). BDNF stands for brain-derived neurotrophic factor and is a protein that is released during exercise that activates stem cells to convert into new neurons.



Bronson, P & Merryman, A. (2009). *Nurture Shock-New thinking about children*. New York: Twelve.

Concentration Cartoon retrieved with permission on July 19, 2013 from [www.cartoonchurch.com](http://www.cartoonchurch.com)

Healy, J. (2004). *Your Child's Growing Mind* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Broadway Books.

Medina, J. (2008). *Brain Rules*. Seattle: Pear Press.

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