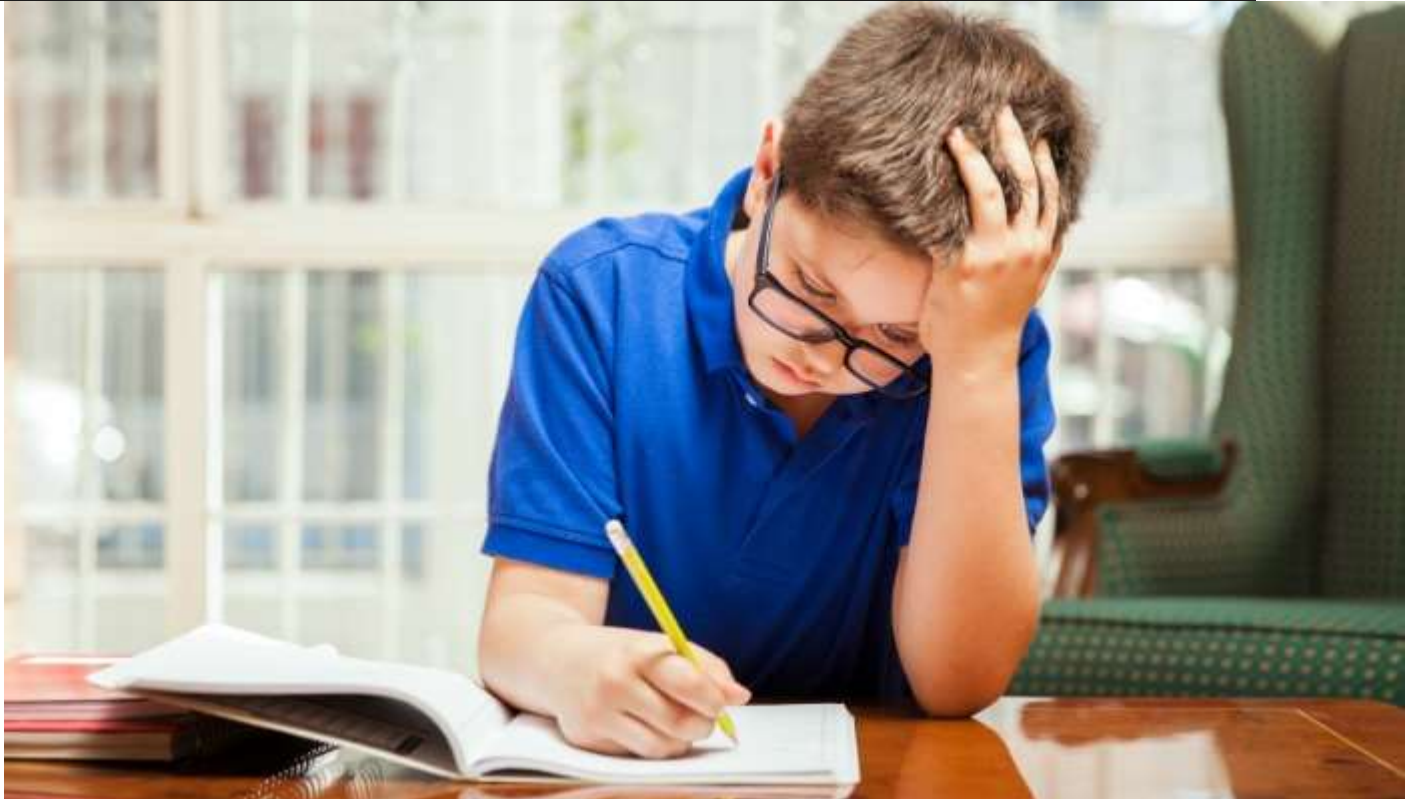


Is Too Much Homework Really The Problem?

by Nicole Johnson

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I attended elementary school in the 1980s, and I remember having homework. Most of my Gen Xer friends concur—they also had homework in first through sixth grade. I distinctly recall the rule in our house: No playing until your homework was finished. Often the assignment was minimal—a mimeographed worksheet, spelling, vocabulary practice, or nightly reading. But we most definitely had homework in elementary school.

Recently there has been a great deal of debate surrounding homework at the elementary level. Several studies have found that it is not beneficial and that it

can even be harmful. A few U.S. schools have decided against giving homework to elementary students. In 2015, principal, Jane Hsu, of New York City's P.S. 116 elementary school, abolished homework, asking families to read instead. Studies suggest homework causes undue stress and is taxing on the family, that it takes time away from our children that is better spent playing or unwinding, and that it is an [unnecessary burden for overworked parents](#) who are already short on time.

Homework has been called the 21st century's "new family dinner."

Personally, I find this move away from homework disturbing for several reasons. First, I believe it is beneficial to ask our children, each day, or several times a week, to follow through with something. Obligations like this foster accountability and consistency, which in turn prepares our children for the more rigorous work of the middle school and high school years. If we rid elementary school of homework, we set our kids up to fail when, in their later academic years, we ask them to take on something new—hours and hours of homework. How will they know how to commit to something they've never done?

In truth, the problem isn't homework, but what we've done to it. Our children are being asked to perform at higher levels of difficulty at younger ages than ever before. They are asked to do a much higher *volume* of homework than we were. In the '80s, we had homework that increased based on age and grade level. It was a slow progression that allowed us to adjust each year. Today's kids get bogged down with far too much, too soon.

And these days, kids carry [much more of a load](#) than just homework. Kids today live highly structured lives, with multiple activities planned and organized and calendarized until kids are painted into a corner with not a minute to spare. Children as young as 5 and 6 are encouraged to play competitive sports and various other extracurricular activities. They go from school to practice to dinner

to bed. Kids often have multiple practices per week and on weekends, which in the '70s and '80s were reserved for family time. Added extracurriculars eat up at least as much "family time" as homework. And parents put that extra burden on themselves.

No longer are weekends a time for visiting grandparents or aunts and uncles after mornings of big breakfasts and cartoon watching. No longer do children run around with a pack of neighborhood kids. Instead, we wake children up early and shuttle them to games as we huddle around dew-covered fields trying to ignore the buzzing phones in our pockets.

No, it isn't just homework that is taxing our kids. It is the increasing demands of the 21st century family. Homework has merely become a convenient scapegoat. Perhaps instead of unilaterally deciding that homework is an antiquated idea, we should look at why we are too busy to help our kids with homework and why they are too busy to do it.

I fear by making homework the bad guy, we are coddling yet another future generation. We are giving them a free pass by saying, "Hey, if this is too hard and you are too busy, it's okay, we'll fix it for you."

When I was a kid, we did our homework. We were held accountable. We learned that you showed up, you sat down, and you put your head in the books. And then you went outside to run around the neighborhood in an unplanned fashion. Our job was to be kids and to go school. It was as simple as that. Maybe it should be that simple again.