

The amount of homework your young child brings home can seem overwhelming. Even in elementary school, the homework load can be very time consuming. Kids can feel stressed, anxious or depressed just like adults!

The good news is that, as a parent, you have the opportunity to help your child learn some helpful lessons about life itself. It is normal to feel stressed when faced with challenges. School is your child's pint-sized "job". Their struggle to meet the challenging academic and social demands of school is an important and valuable part of their healthy development. It is useful helping them learn how to effectively manage the demands of life as an adult. Most kids will eventually learn to adjust to what is expected from them without too much difficulty and will learn a few important lessons along the way such as making prioritizing their time, the painful consequences of procrastination and how to ask for help when needed.

As a parent, you can help your child along their unique, developmental journey. Maintaining a regular routine at home with meals, bedtime routine and bedtime hours is important. Make sure that your child has opportunities to relax, have fun, engage with the family and expend physical energy. Limit video game and television time which makes it more difficult for your child to manage his or her time. Most importantly, respond to your child in a way that will communicate your belief in their ability to succeed.

For example, when your child expresses unhappiness or anger about their assigned homework, and you respond with, "Wow. That must feel overwhelming," they learn that it's ok to share how they feel and that they are not facing their struggles alone. When you follow up with questions such as, "What do you think is the most important thing to do first?" or "How much time do you think it will take you to do this part?" it will further grow your child's confidence in their ability to tackle their own problems. Support your child by providing empathy and understanding, while at the same time voicing confidence in your child's ability to tackle the problem.

Sometimes, children become so stressed that it is time to step in and provide additional support and intervention. Children can act differently than adults when they are depressed or anxious and their symptoms may vary. This makes it more challenging to determine just how much stress your child might be feeling. Whereas a depressed adult might become quiet, isolated and withdrawn, a depressed child might become increasingly agitated, angry and irritable. They might engage in tantrums or behavior that is difficult to manage, which leads to more stress on the other family members. Often a depressed child will make negative comments about themselves, or there will be a sudden change in personality. Their sleep patterns or appetite might change or they might have a sudden increase in attention-seeking behaviors or complain of stomachaches, headaches, aches and pains. If you notice any of the following behaviors in your child, it would be a good idea to consult a qualified mental health professional to ensure that your child has the specific support he or she needs during an particularly difficult stretch. Depression is treatable and the world will appear much brighter and more hopeful when those supports are in place.