

HELPING A DISTRACTED TEEN COMPLETE HOMEWORK

Kids have a lot of distractions these days. Cell phones, texting, video games, Facebook, Twitter—so many forms of media can make it hard for teens to focus on schoolwork, especially if they have to use the computer to complete homework and class projects. It is often too tempting to stop doing something that requires effort (homework) to do something fun or just procrastinate (texting friends, watching YouTube videos, updating Facebook, etc.).

Gone are the days when studying meant spending time in a library study carrel with minimal distraction. According to a Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll, 53 percent of children ages 12–17 said they did at least one other thing while studying, and 21 percent kept busy with at least *three* tasks in addition to their homework.

Many teenagers and their parents believe that this generation is simply better at multitasking because they do it so often. To watch a teenager study algebra while chatting on Facebook and listening to the TV may make you think today's teens must have better focus than previous generations. But David Walsh, psychologist, president of the Minneapolis-based National Institute on Media and the Family, and author of *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*, says, "The question is not whether they're doing fine. Some kids are very bright. The question is could they be doing better if they weren't constantly shifting back and forth?"

Certain practices will make life easier for everyone in the family when it comes to study and homework time, though some may require an adjustment for teens. The following are some ideas to make study time more successful:



1. IF THE WORK DOESN'T DIRECTLY INVOLVE USING THE INTERNET, UNPLUG OR DISCONNECT THE CABLE.

It eliminates your ability to easily open up your Internet browser and will help you focus on what you really should be doing.



2. TURN OFF THE TV.

TV can be a huge time sink. In 2008, Americans watched an average of five hours per day of television and three hours per month of Internet videos. That is a total of almost 11 weeks per year! Some TV isn't bad, but it's best saved for after homework is finished.



3. SET A SPECIFIC TIME FOR USING RECREATIONAL WEB SITES.

It's easy to start with the intention to write an essay, wander over to Facebook, and suddenly realize that an hour has passed. While disconnecting from the Web will probably go over like a lead balloon, letting your teen schedule 30 minutes or even an hour for leisure time should lessen the resistance.



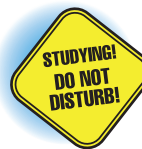
4. TAKE SHORT BREAKS.

Encourage your teen to take short breaks by getting up to stretch, reading something entertaining, or eating a snack.



5. DO WORK NOW RATHER THAN LATER.

Have your teen schedule leisure time on the computer after he or she has started on schoolwork. It's much easier to return to a project that you've begun than to continually put off getting started.



6. DESIGNATE SPECIFIC AREAS FOR HOMEWORK AND STUDYING.

Possibilities include your teen's room or the kitchen or dining room table. Eliminate as much distraction as possible.



7. ORGANIZE STUDY AND HOMEWORK PROJECTS.

Get your teen a large calendar, one that allows space for jotting down due dates in the daily boxes. He or she can mark exam dates in one color; report due dates in another color; etc. This will serve as a reminder so that things aren't set aside until the last minute (or forgotten completely).

Homework is often a frontline battleground, and most likely there will be pushback to implementing new rules. It shouldn't take long for your teen to adjust to the new routine, though. Establishing some guidelines for distraction-free study time is the best way to help yourself and your teen get through the nightly ritual of homework.

Sources: Nielsen Wire, kidshealth.org