

A Parent's Guide to Homework Help:

What to Do When You Don't Know the Answer

There is a pretty good chance that sometime during middle school or high school, your child will come to you with a problem that even you cannot solve. What can you do to help when you don't know the answer? Here is a list of constructive ways to assist your child.

1. **Be positive.** While it's acceptable to briefly empathize with your frustrated child, try to respond optimistically so the child knows that there is a solution and you will help him or her find it. Don't demean your child's struggle; all students have problems at some point. There is nothing wrong with struggling to understand something.
2. **Listen to your child.** Ask your child to explain exactly what it is that he or she doesn't understand. If it is a textbook-related question, have your child show you where it is found in the book.
3. **Get the whole picture.** Ask your child if the teacher provided any extra materials such as handouts or Web resources, which might help. If it is an assignment that takes several days or weeks to complete, have your child check with the teacher to be sure he or she has everything.
4. **Re-read the question or homework task.** Once you have all the material, re-read the question or problem together. Break down the problem into component parts, if possible. Take an analytical approach and work through the steps together. It is acceptable to guide your child through the steps, but beware of completing the work for him or her. Your child will not learn the material and will ultimately suffer.
5. **Use the textbook as a resource.** Textbooks are usually filled with examples and supplementary materials that help relate concepts to the real world. Be certain to also check the textbook Web site, if there is one. Sites such as glencoe.com offer a wide array of text-related materials, including illustrations, Web links, and games that help students learn in a fun and interactive environment.