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# Homework Contracts: Tapping the Power of Parents

## Study & Organization <sup>[1]</sup>

Students who regularly complete and turn in homework assignments perform significantly better in school than those of similar ability who do not do homework (Olympia et al., 1994). Homework is valuable because it gives students a chance to practice, extend, and entrench the academic skills taught in school. Parents can be instrumental in encouraging and motivating their children to complete homework. This homework contract intervention (adapted from Miller & Kelly, 1994) uses goal-setting, a written contract, and rewards to boost student completion (and accuracy) of homework. Students also learn the valuable skills of breaking down academic assignments into smaller, more manageable subtasks and setting priorities for work completion.

## Materials:

- Copy of Daily Homework Planner (see attachment at bottom of this page)

## Preparation:

- Train Parents to Be Supportive 'Homework Coaches'. Parents are often very committed to helping their child successfully complete homework. To ensure that parents have positive interactions with students around homework, though, the school should sponsor one or more parent workshops to offer tips on how to be 'homework coaches'. In particular, parents should be offered strategies for listening in a careful and non-judgmental manner to their child, to avoid nagging about homework, and to brainstorm with their child about possible solutions for common homework difficulties (e.g., writing down all homework assignments correctly). Additionally, they should be taught the essentials for setting up and following through with a simple reward system at home (Miller & Kelly, 1994). At this introductory workshop, parents would also be trained in the steps of the homework contract (described below).

## Steps in Implementing This Intervention:

- **Step 1:** The Parent Creates a Homework Reward System for the Child. The parent should put together a short menu of reasonable daily and weekly rewards that the child can earn

for successfully completing homework. Good choices for daily rewards are those that do not cost a lot of money, and do not take much time to deliver. While weekly rewards should be somewhat larger than daily rewards, they should still be affordable and not require a great deal of the parent's time. Because any rewards that the parent chooses must appeal to the child, the parent should consult the child in the selection of rewards.

- **Step 2:** The Parent Negotiates the Homework Contract Program With the Child. Before starting the homework contract, the parent should meet with the child to introduce the program and to set up a reward system (see Step 1). Together, they agree on the percentage of homework goals the child must complete each day (e.g., 80%) to earn the daily homework reward. They also agree on the number of times in a week that the student must earn the daily reward in order to be eligible for the weekly reward (e.g., 3 times in a week).
- **Step 3:** The Parent and Child Fill Out the Daily Homework Planner. Each day when the student has assigned homework, the parent and student sit down with a copy of the Daily Homework Planner [web page; pdf document]. Together they preview the homework assignment for all subject areas. Then they break the assignment into manageable 'chunks' or subtasks. A description of each subtask is written into the Daily Homework Planner in enough detail so that both parent and student know what must be done to complete that homework chunk. A description for a math subtask, for example, might read "Complete 20 multiplication problems from pg. 40 of math book, then use answer key to check work". The parent and child might write on the homework contract that the child will reserve 30 minutes to complete that subtask.
- **Step 4:** The Parent Checks the Child's Homework Completion and Delivers Any Earned Rewards. When the student has finished his or her homework, the parent and student hold a brief follow-up conference. They go through the Daily Homework Planner sheet, circling Y[es] or N[o] to indicate whether each subtask was completed within the time set aside for it.
  - If the student earned the daily reward, the parent has the student choose an item from the reward menu. (Daily rewards should be given immediately if possible.)
  - If the student also earned the weekly reward, the student can also select an item from the weekly reward menu (to be delivered in a timely manner but when convenient to the parent).
- **Step 5:** Fade the Reward System. As the child shows that he or she is able to complete daily homework assignments on a regular basis, the parent may want to start 'fading' the reward system. First, the parent may stop the daily rewards but continue the weekly rewards. Then the weekly rewards can be stretched out to biweekly and eventually monthly rewards. In the final stage of fading, the parent can stop giving out regular rewards altogether. Instead, the child's motivation can be kept high by the parent 'surprising' him or her occasionally with an unexpected reward.

## Troubleshooting

The parent does not want to use the homework contract If a parent is unable or unwilling to use the homework contract with a student, the intervention can be used in school instead. At the end of the school day, for example, the teacher or other staff member might meet with the child to preview all homework assignments and assist the student in filling out the Daily Homework Planner. If the student brings the Contract sheet and completed homework back to school the next day, the teacher can give him or her the earned daily (and perhaps weekly) reward.

# Attachments

- [Daily Homework Planner Sheet](#) [2]

## Jim's Hints

**Identify Other People To Help the Parent With the Homework Contract** . If the student attends an afterschool program where he or she completes homework, personnel from that program may be willing to set up and use the homework contract with the child. Or if there is a responsible older sibling in the home, he or she may be willing to administer a homework contract system. The parent would still be expected to deliver any rewards that the student may have earned.

## References

- Miller, D.L. & Kelly, M.L. (1994). The use of goal setting and contingency contracting for improving children's homework performance. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*,27, 73-84.
- Olympia, D.E., Sheridan, S.M., Jenson, W.R., & Andrews, D. (1994). Using student-managed interventions to increase homework completion and accuracy. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*,27, 85-99.

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