

Handling the Homework Horrors

by Mariadonna Litwak, MSW, LCSW

I recently attended a week-long professional development course, presented by a modern day icon in the field of psychotherapy: Marsha Linehan. She is to therapy what Bruce Springsteen is to music: a living legend and her fans had come out in droves to learn from a master. I had been anticipating the workshop for months and it was exceeding my wildest expectations..... until the end of the first day. I was asked to do something that I haven't done in years: complete a homework assignment. "You've got to be kidding!" I muttered, perhaps a bit too loudly, since the instructor responded immediately that homework was necessary to reinforce what was being taught in class. Several therapists turned to glare at me. If I'd honed the ability to read social cues, I would have snapped my mouth shut in embarrassment, but no, displaying the maturity of a six-year old, I grumbled under my breath. I argued the pros and cons of doing homework. After all, I'm an adult, what would be the worst that could happen if I didn't do an assignment? There were hundreds of people in the class. One missing assignment wouldn't be noticed. But maybe, we'd have to turn in our assignments in order to get credit for the course. Could they fail me for a course that I'd voluntarily taken if I didn't complete homework? I soon realized that I was facing the same struggle that millions of students and parents face on a daily basis: dealing with the Homework Horrors.

As children begin another school year, many parents actively prepare themselves for the familiar struggle of motivating their kids to do their homework. There are a plethora of tips, tricks and strategies designed to motivate kids, but the simplest strategy may be the most obvious: know your child's learning style and give him effective homework strategies for that learning style.

Learning Style: Is your child an auditory, visual or kinesthetic (tactile) learner? Learning styles refer to the manner in which your senses process information. Although children may use a combination of learning styles, most have a distinct preference for a particular learning style, and that is the way that they learn best. By determining your child's learning style, you'll be able to teach him specific skills that will allow for the most effective and efficient absorption of information.

- **Auditory Learners** process information best when they hear it. They rely on verbal communication, including tone of voice, volume, voice quality and even rate of speech. If your child needs to hear something before understanding it, your child is an auditory learner. A homework strategy for an auditory learner could be to sing assignments, or set them to music (in much the same way that most of us learned the alphabet; by singing it). Your child could record an assignment and reap the dual benefits of listening to the assignment when recording it and again when playing it back. Memorizing facts becomes easier and much more enjoyable when set to a rap song.
- **Tactile or kinesthetic learners** learn by doing. They are "hands on" and need to be actively involved in order to learn. They learner by participating in demonstrations, projects or experiments. Usually a tactile learner has a short attention span so it is important that homework strategies allow for frequent breaks. The tactile learner can walk or stand while

reading, squeeze a stress ball or play with clay. Tactile learners should be encouraged to act out or perform their homework, e.g. why study about George Washington, when you can actually be George Washington? Kinesthetic learners benefit from performing in front of an audience, but performing in front of the mirror will work just as well.

- **Visual Learners** need to see visuals in order to learn new information. You may have heard the phrase, “if it’s not written down, it doesn’t exist”. This typifies a visual learner, who must see something in order to process information. A visual learner uses a speaker’s posture, body language and facial expressions, as cues to processing information. Pictures, charts, graphs and diagrams help a visual learner. At homework time, your child could illustrate an idea as a picture, a chart or a map. Using highlighters and color coded folders are helpful to visual learners, as are watching film clips or videos.

Parents who teach their children homework strategies geared to their unique learning style are giving them lifelong tools that they can use to process information efficiently and effectively. (And, in case you were wondering, I complete the homework from my professional development course!)