



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

A Parent Guide for Table Etiquette – from the First Meal to the Last Supper HOMEWORK TABLE

Etiquette – protocol, customs, and life-connecting skills – can be taught through multiple settings. Each issue of the 2013-14 *Parent Partnership Handbook* emphasizes the etiquette associated with a particular kind of table: (1) the family dinner table, (2) the homework table, (3) the classroom table, (4) the school cafeteria table, (5) the party/social-guest table, and (6) the Eucharistic table. This newsletter focuses on **HOMEWORK ETIQUETTE**.

Like it or not, homework is here to stay! Though it too often becomes a family burden, in the ideal, homework is a tool for developing independent work habits, initiative, and industry. The homework table is an important setting for parents to teach the etiquette of a character-forming work ethic.

Two mantras may prove to be helpful motivators when it comes to the subject of homework. 1. “Plan your work and work your plan.” 2. “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” The following homework etiquette guidelines emerge from the premise that homework is WORK done at HOME minus sibling scuffles, trips to the refrigerator or bathroom, sharpening pencils, texting, chatting, surfing the internet, or entertainment.

Organize for School Success – Provide a box for each child to store schoolbag, projects, materials, PE shoes, permission slips, parent-signed notices, lunch, etc.,

Be an Agent of Encouragement – Offer positive feedback. Compliment effort, talk about the purpose and lesson learned, and give specific feedback, e.g., comment on the level of difficulty, neat completion, spelling, handwriting, or use of computer, etc. Make it clear that mistakes are a valuable part of life and a teaching-tool; that your only expectation is sincere effort. When you express disapproval, assure your child that you value and love him/her but that you disapprove of the activity, behavior, or lack of effort. Let him/her know that with responsibility comes consequence.

Plan Ahead: The purpose of long-range projects is to develop an industry work ethic by giving steady care over time to a task. Industry is blocked when children wait till due-date to produce the project. With calendar at hand, help your child divide a long-range project into small, manageable sections. By grade six hold the child accountable for creating the time plan and submitting it to you for input. Plan in time for library use and supply shopping.

Maintain Routine – Monday through Thursday establish a regular homework time in a non-distracting space that permits easy parent supervision. In the event that your child reports “no homework today,” he/she still reports to the homework table and uses the usual time span to review, read ahead, work on a long-range project, or practice skills. Homework etiquette includes, but is not limited to **Ten Tips**:

1. Expect length of homework time to reflect the expectations stated in the school handbook. (Generally that amounts to 10 minutes multiplied by the grade level.)
2. Communicate clearly that your child must complete all assignments in an appropriate manner and time frame before playing, TV, Internet use, video games, etc. Permit brief interludes to snack or stretch to refresh the spirit.
3. Ban the use of electronic devices, reading material or diversionary gadgets from the homework table. Silence “smart phones.” Ignore telephone or text messages during homework.
4. Limit Internet and computer use to homework requirements.
5. Supply all necessary materials. Involve the child in the process of identifying and gathering supply needs.
6. Assist with memory work. Listen to lessons. Use index cards to create personalized flash cards for quick review and drill.
7. Examine work for thoroughness and accuracy. Teach how to complete assignments carefully, thoroughly, and accurately with forethought and method. Anticipate upcoming deadlines.
8. Break large projects into smaller, manageable pieces; take a break between tasks. Do not give up without giving a task a second try. If your child meets frustration, switch subjects or reverse mealtime or bath time with study time.
9. Establish the policy, “See if you can figure out your homework and consult reference materials. Then come to me if you do not understand it.”
10. Help, advise, suggest... but do not do the assignment for the child. Let your child learn from the teacher consequence of incomplete assignments or poor study habits.

Monitor Progress: Regularly review all schoolwork—home assignments, classwork, and returned tests. Assist if needed but let your child choose topics, projects, and methods. Help your child to diagnose errors and identify practical goals for improvement.

Establish a Homework Buddy: Make it a student responsibility to contact a responsible classmate to get missed assignments or clarifications.

Dr. Patricia McCormack, IHM, a former Catholic schoolteacher and catechist, is a formation education consultant, an author of several books as well as the PARENT PARTNERSHIP HANDBOOK feature of *Today's Catholic Teacher*, and director of **IHM Formative Support for Parents and Teachers**, Arlington, VA. She speaks and writes frequently on topics of child formation. *Reach her at DrPatMcCormack@aol.com.*

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