

F O C U S

VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE, LLC

“I HATE HOMEWORK!”

When your child vents that they hate homework, what are you supposed to say? Here's what the experts recommend.

1. “I hear you.” “I know. After sitting in class all day, probably the *last* thing you feel like doing is sitting down again and working on 10 long division problems.” This is the empathetic way Adele Faber, author of *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, suggests wading into a conversation about hating homework. But then, she says, explain the problem and talk through solutions: “The problem is your teacher insists that everyone get more practice. So what would make it easier for you? Divide up the work? Do five problems before supper and five after? Or would you rather play first, and tackle them all at once?”

2. “We're in this together.” “Often times, parents go negative,” observes *America's Supernanny* Deborah Tillman. “The child says, ‘I'm not doing my homework!’ The parent says, ‘Yes you are doing your homework!’ Then it's back-and-forth and arguing.” Tillman says you want to motivate your child, but you also want to make sure they understand that you're not going to engage in a battle over homework. “What I

Learning How to Meditate

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years and it continues to grow in popularity. This mindful practice can help aid anxiety and depression, chronic pain, cancer, bowel diseases, high blood pressure, insomnia, addiction and so much more.

HOW TO MEDITATE Learning how to elicit the relaxation response is the key to meditating effectively. It's straightforward and it becomes easier with time and repetition, even if you've struggled to calm your mind during past meditation attempts. Don't expect to jump into a full-length session the first time you try meditation. It takes time to learn how to still your mind for extended periods of time. Start with just two or three minutes. Gradually increase the amount of time you meditate as you become acclimated to the practice. **Choose a time.** If you're most focused in the morning, meditate when you first wake up. If you find that you need to relax before bed, carve out a few minutes to still your mind at the end of your bedtime routine. You might also take meditation breaks at work, or tack a practice onto the end of your yoga sessions. **Create the ideal meditation space.** Choose a space with few distractions. Your bedroom, a sun porch, or a quiet den might be good options. The space should be calming, with gentle lighting and a comfortable temperature. Place pillows or other accessories (such as beads or a candle) that you'll need for your practice within reach. It's a good idea to have a standalone timer or your smartphone nearby, so you don't have to constantly watch the clock. **Sit up straight.** While you can practice meditation lying down, standing up, or even walking, sitting tends to provide the optimal combination of focus and relaxation. You can sit on a cushion, a mat, or a blanket on the floor, if it's comfortable for you. Some people place a block under their buttocks to support them. If it's too uncomfortable for you to sit on the floor or you have a hard time getting up, sit on a chair. Press your back flat against the back of the chair and place your feet flat on the floor to keep your spine properly aligned. **Position your hands.** Decide where you would like your hands to be during your practice. You might place them on your knees with your palms up or down, in prayer position at your chest, or in one of the many mudras, or symbolic positions that are part of traditional yoga practice.

(HOMEWORK CONTINUED)

do is: homework time for the whole family. Everybody's going to do something. I put all the children at the table: a preschooler, an eleventh grader, a middle schooler.

Everybody's doing homework at homework time. Then it's a lot easier because they feel like they're not alone."

3. "How about a snack?" Especially when a child is having trouble with it, homework is often difficult or boring, says Christine Carter, child development expert and author of *Raising Happiness*. And homework time often takes place when kids are wiped out and grumpy. "You have to do homework at the end of the day when all of your self-control is depleted or your willpower is depleted. So it's asking something very difficult of children, especially younger ones," she says. "To reinstate that self-control, your blood sugar level needs to be rising." So when kids say they hate homework, Carter says, "You can say, well you're going to hate it a little bit less if you have a snack." Offer something that's protein-rich, and don't forget to hydrate with a big glass of water. Blood sugar and humor restored, homework will go a little easier.

4. "Tell it to the teacher." When kids complain they have too much homework, they often have a point, says Madeline Levine, psychologist and author of *The Price of Privilege*. Once kids are a little older, they can start learning to advocate for themselves and talking to their teacher about the workload. This teaches them something important, too — how to communicate about something that isn't working for them. "Because they're going to go out to work and they'll have to talk to their boss or their college roommate or their spouse," Levine says.

5. "Break it down." In *Bird by Bird*, the writer Anne Lamott famously

MEDITATION TIPS

- Practice when it's practical. For some people, mornings are most convenient. Others prefer to meditate at the end of the day.
- Stick with it. Once you've found your ideal time of day to meditate, make it a habit.
- Remember it's a process. You're not going to emerge from your first session a changed human being. Give it time and you'll gradually see improvements.
- Take your practice with you. Meditate wherever you can find a few quiet moments alone—in your bedroom, at work, or while you're on a walk in the park.
- Accessorize. Use something meaningful to you, such as a candle, a piece of jewelry, or a photo of a loved one to focus your mind.
- Be prepared to be uncomfortable. Stilling your thoughts is harder than it sounds. It could take a while for you to feel comfortable in the practice.
- Don't fight the feeling. Relax into the practice. Let your thoughts drift away. Ease into your breath. Even if you feel a little bit uncomfortable, try to give in to the feeling and not push back against it.
- Be kind to yourself. If you don't get the hang of meditation right away, forgive yourself and try again. You will eventually get it.

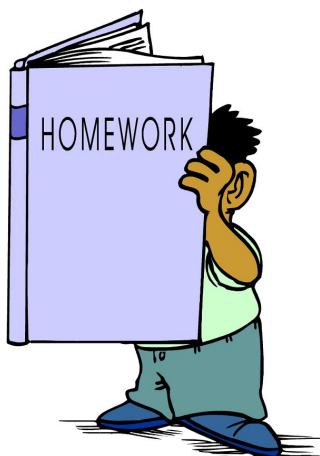
Check in with yourself. After each session, pause for a moment and take stock of how you're feeling. Have you let go of any tension or anxiety you were carrying? If not, do you need to relax for a few minutes more? For more on learning how to mediate, buy [Meditation](#), an Online Guide from Harvard Medical School.

**Source: HEALTHbeat at <https://www.health.harvard.edu>
Harvard Health Publishing, 4 Blackfan Circle, 4th Floor, B**



(HOMEWORK CONTINUED) describes her 10-year-old brother's despair at having left a big homework project — a report on birds — until the last minute. "...he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, 'Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.'" Lamott took a lesson for writing from her dad's wise words, but there's a lesson for parents there, too. "Kids experience a lot of fear and stress doing big projects," says [Diane Divecha](#), development psychologist and research affiliate of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. When your child is struggling with a big homework project (or with the dread of getting started), help them break it down into manageable pieces. Show your child how to make a to-do list, a list of things they'll need, and a step-by-step timeline. Offer help with time management, including how to cut back on the project if necessary. But resist the temptation to do any of the actual work. Well-meaning though your impulse may be, you'll be doing more harm than good. "Helping too much undermines a kid's intrinsic motivation, undermines confidence, undermines skill development," Divecha says.

Source: [GreatSchools.org](#)



Retraining the Brain to Treat Chronic Back Pain

More than 25 million people in the U.S. live with chronic pain. This is pain that lasts for more than three months. The most common type of chronic pain is chronic back pain. Often, no physical cause for this pain can be found. In these cases, it may stem from brain changes that persist after an injury healed. These brain changes provide a warning for you to restrict your movement and let the body recover. But in some cases, they can cause the pain to persist long after the damage has healed. Researchers have developed a treatment called pain reprocessing therapy (PRT) to help the brain “unlearn” this kind of pain. PRT teaches people to perceive pain signals sent to the brain as less threatening. A research team performed the first clinical test of PRT. Participants had mild to moderate chronic back pain for which no physical cause could be found. The volunteers received one of three treatments: four weeks of intensive PRT, a harmless injection into the back, or continued standard care. After four weeks, 66% of people who received PRT reported being pain-free or nearly pain-free. Less than 25% of people who received injections and 10% of those receiving usual care reported similar improvements. Brain scans showed that people who received PRT had less pain-associated brain activity. “This isn’t suggesting that your pain is not real or that it’s ‘all in your head,’” says Dr. Tor Wager of Dartmouth College, who co-led the study. “What it means is that if the causes are in the brain, the solutions may be there, too.” **Source: NIH News in Health, January 2022.** <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2022/01/retraining-brain-treat-chronic-back-pain>

Supporting Siblings of a Neurodivergent Child

Personal Perspective: Five tips to help siblings feel seen and heard.

The other night, two of my daughters were arguing in public. They called my husband to referee, and he has yet to learn not to get involved. My middle daughter, let's call her T, was in complete meltdown mode, and her little sister, we'll call her P, was not in the mood to deal with it. While these two are besties, this fight went on a little longer than usual, and P lamented how everyone always gives in to T and said “everyone loves her more.” Part of this is because P is a teenage drama queen and has attention-seeking behavior. However, another part was her expressing years of frustration at always playing second fiddle and tiptoeing around T, her neurodivergent sister, to help prevent her from having panic attacks and meltdowns. While being T's mother at times is exhausting, I never realized how challenging it is to be her sibling, and in this case, her little sister. I always worried about our oldest

(SUPPORTING SIBLINGS CONTINUED)

daughter, A, the second parent in the home. Yes, I said second and not third! A took on a lot of responsibility. She was the one to navigate school and camp with T, holding her in her arms when she sobbed because she was scared when mommy was not around. Having a neurodivergent sister pushed A to become a special educator, and I could not be prouder. In worrying about A and ensuring she had a childhood, I never considered P's perspective. As the youngest child, she followed T in school and teachers assumed she would have attention problems, learning issues, or behavioral challenges. Well, P had none. I felt guilt for P because she grew up in a problematic shadow, as T always demanded a lot of attention and help with homework. T required me to talk with teachers and school administrators. T needed *me* a lot. But what did T's sisters need? And did I always give it to them? Did I even ask? Rick Lavoie, a famous educator, says in his movie FAT City that being fair doesn't mean doing the same for every person. He likens it to performing CPR; you can't speak to someone lying on the ground. It's true. I can't give chest compressions to all my children at once – I don't have the bandwidth or time, especially when only one person needs CPR in that moment. The same is true for a parent or educator. It's OK to give each child what they need as long as you can look at all your children and say, "I would do it for you if you needed it." So yes, I have spent more hours with T on school work, shuffling to therapy, and speaking to teachers. Luckily, I didn't have to do it for the others. But I would because I love them all. I need to give each one of them what they need when they need it! Does T know how to push my buttons? Of course. Does she know what I feel guilty about? Well, that's on me. I can't let her see my guilt. So, I need to give myself a break, and so do you. You don't have to feel guilty as

long as you support and love each of your kids and give them the tools they need to build healthy relationships with one another. As parents, we do our best. Is our best always good enough? Maybe, maybe not. But it's all we can do! We can certainly try to be wonderful parents to all of our children. Here are five helpful reminders to support the siblings of a neurodivergent child:

- Share age-appropriate information with your neurotypical child. It's important they understand a sibling's challenges, why they think differently, and how they can support one another.
- Validate your child's feelings when they're upset about something their neurodivergent sibling has done or how they are acting. Yes, sometimes, the public meltdowns are embarrassing. Acknowledge it. Let them feel that sharing their feelings with you is safe, and don't judge them.
- Spend special time with each child. Every single one of your children is special. They should all have a special time with you.
- Identify a sibling support group. Your children can share their feelings with other siblings, which might remove some of the resentment.
- Encourage your children to do things together. Let them bond and remind them that they love each other.

Source: Lisa Shienhouse, M.A., Director of Community Programs at Ohel's Children's Home and Family Services, Posted March 20, 2024, Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/retrain-your-brain/202403/supporting-siblings-of-a-neurodivergent-child>



**RESILIENCE IS BASED ON COMPASSION FOR OURSELVES
AS WELL AS COMPASSION FOR OTHERS Sharon Salzberg**

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