Homework is rarely the favorite activity of middle schoolers, but most parents and teachers agree that homework is good for students. Research by Harris Cooper, the nation’s leading homework expert, supports this idea. He found that middle school students who do up to 90 minutes of homework per night do better in school than students who do no homework. However, students who do more than 90 minutes per night tend to do worse, probably because those students are having serious difficulty in school.

Parents play an important role in homework. Contrary to the popular media, a study I did at NIU demonstrated that homework is not a battleground between parents and their children. When with parents, students enjoyed homework more than when alone and concentrated better than with peers. In another study I did with Jon Miller, parent involvement with homework promoted “school orientation” (valuing school, wanting to do well, and working hard) in middle school students. Involvement at school was the most beneficial form of parent involvement for students.

Here are some research-supported, time-tested ways that parents can help with homework:

- Learn about each teacher’s expectations for homework. If the teachers have not let you know, ask them.
- Ask your child if they have homework each day and establish a place that is free of distractions (more successful students tend to concentrate solely on their homework rather than trying to do something else while doing homework).
- Limit your child’s television watching, video game playing, and social interactions on school nights.
- Your child, not you, should do their homework. Give pointers for improvement or find someone who can, but make your child responsible for the bulk of the work.
- Check to see that your child’s homework is complete.
- Do notice what your child is studying. Ask them about what they are learning and talk about it with them.
- If your child seems to have too much homework (more than 60-90 minutes per night) or is struggling with homework to the point of frustration, it is important to contact your child’s teacher so you can work together to help the student be more successful.