

TRAINING SESSION 8

Helping Your Mentee With Homework

- Author:** Author: Patti MacRae (adapted from materials from the LEARNS project)
- Duration:** 60–90 minutes
- Materials:** Chalkboard or newsprint, chalk or markers, overheads, handouts
- A/V:** Overhead projector
- Room set-up:** Place chairs in U shape facing the chalkboard or newsprint.
- Description:** Helping mentees with homework can be a large part of the academic assistance mentors can provide. Homework elicits a wide range of emotions, from anxiety, to grudging acceptance, to genuine enjoyment. The overall goal of homework is to teach students to work independently, plan effectively, get organized, and think on their own. The mentor’s primary role will be to help the mentee in this endeavor, offering support that encourages the growth of the basic study skills. In this session mentors will learn how to effectively help their mentee with homework.
- Session goals:** By the end of the session, participants will:
- Understand strategies youth need in order to successfully complete homework
 - Identify ways mentors can support mentees as they do their homework
 - Learn key strategies to help mentees overcome difficult homework situations

Agenda & instructions:

1. Introductions

15 minutes

Have the participants introduce themselves, tell the group how long they have been matched with their mentee, and mention any academics issues that have come up with their mentee.

As participants talk, chart academic issues on newsprint or the chalkboard. As you move through the session try to incorporate these issues into your session. If you cannot, state that you will follow up with them later with answers or ideas.

2. *Brainstorm: Understanding Homework* *15 minutes*

Post Overhead 1: "What We Think About Homework." Have participants discuss in pairs their thoughts to the following questions:

- Think back to when you had to do homework. What are some of the feelings you associated with having to do it? What do you remember about your homework?
- Do you think anything is different about homework today as compared to when you were in school?
- How do you think kids today feel about homework?

Ask for report-outs and additional discussion from the group. How might participants' own attitudes and experiences with homework help or hinder them as they work with their mentees?

3. *Understanding Strategies: The Role of the Adult in Homework Help* *10 minutes*

Post Overhead 2: The Role of the Adult in Homework Help. Review each strategy and check for understanding

To help the child to think about his/her own learning by:

- Activating prior knowledge
- Inviting students to reflect on their knowledge and learning
- Helping the child reflect on his own work (self-assessment)

To assist the child in attaining homework independence by:

- Organizing: work, directions, priorities
- Modeling a variety of strategies
- Identifying stumbling blocks and/or difficulties
- Offering helpful strategies a child can utilize independently

What are some examples of each of these strategies? Ask for questions or further comment.

**4. What Does Homework Look Like? Examples
From Real Life**

25 minutes

Homework assignments can be confusing to students. Use the examples provided (or find some of your own) to discuss how some assignments are easier than others to understand, and how mentors can help their mentees understand their homework and offer assistance.

Post Overhead 3: “Example 1. Life in the Americas: Sugar and Slaves.”

Ask participants the following questions:

1. What’s your initial reaction to these directions?
2. How many of you had to read this more than once to understand the directions?

In pairs or small groups, have participants discuss the following and then offer their responses to the full group:

1. What would you ask the child to find out if he/she understands the assignment?
2. How could you help the child proceed with the assignment?

Participant responses might include:

- Does the child have the article that he/she was supposed to read?
- Does the child understand the questions being asked? Can he/she explain the assignment to the mentor?
- What did the child think about the article?
- Does the child have a plan for proceeding with the assignment?

Post Overhead 4: “Example 2. Archaeology Video Assignment.”

1. Do you think this assignment is well organized and clear? Why?

Look for responses like:

- The instructions are simple and include examples of what should be included.
- There is room on the paper to write out the answers.
- There are only two questions.

2. In pairs or small groups, have participants discuss how they might help the child with this kind of assignment. Ask for volunteers to report out.

Responses might include:

- Ask the child about the video and why he/she watched it.
- What is the child learning about?
- The mentor might say that he/she doesn't know much about this and ask the child to explain it.
- Help the child jog his memory by asking open questions and following up.
- Remind the child that she only has to write in the space provided.

Post Overhead 5: "Example 3. Math Homework."

1. Ask the participants to share their impressions of this piece of homework:
 - What are the challenges with this kind of homework?
 - How does this page of homework make you feel?
 - How do you think your student might feel about this homework?
 - In pairs or small groups, ask participants to think about ways they could help a student with this homework.

Possible responses might include:

- Make sure they understand the instructions and the basic concepts of fractions.
- Ask if they have a book with examples they could use to help them understand.
- Provide a separate piece of paper to do the problems on.
- Do a few at a time and then take a break or stretch.
- Be empathetic if they seem overwhelmed or nervous about the assignment.
- Offer lots of praise for working on the problems.

Key debrief points:

What general tips or approaches did participants come up with as they went through these three examples? Have the group come up with some key approaches that were used in all three examples, such as:

- They didn't have to be an expert in the particular subject to be helpful.
- The processes that they used included active listening, using open questioning, giving praise, being empathetic.
- They were helping them understand the assignment and organize their ideas.

5. Final Questions & Closing**5–10 minutes**

Distribute Handout 1, "Homework Survival Kit," as one way they can help their mentees get organized and make homework more enjoyable. Also distribute any other resources you think will be helpful and the "Helping Your Mentee With Homework" resource list.

Ask participants for any final questions or comments about what was just covered.

Remind them that teachers have resources that can help mentors as they provide homework help to mentees. Parents should also be kept informed of any successes as well as consulted when there is an ongoing problem.

Pass out a session evaluation form. Remind folks about other upcoming events/trainings as they leave.

How We Think About Homework

Think back to when you had to do homework. What are some of the feelings you associated with having to do it? What do you remember about your homework?

Do you think anything is different about homework today as compared to when you were in school?

How do you think kids today feel about homework?

The Role of the Adult in Homework Help

To help the child to think about his/her own learning (metacognition) by:

- Activating prior knowledge
- Inviting students to reflect on their knowledge and learning
- Helping the child reflect on his own work (self-assessment)

To assist the child in attaining homework independence by:

- Organizing—work, directions, priorities
- Modeling a variety of strategies
- Identifying stumbling blocks and/or difficulties
- Offering helpful strategies a child can utilize independently

Example 1. Life in the Americas: Sugar and Slaves

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read the article and underline or highlight important words and phrases. Use the information to answer questions 1–3 on a separate piece of paper. For question 4, look around your house for foods that you eat that contain sugar. Think about foods that you eat as a regular part of your diet as well as treats like candy, cake, or cookies.

1. Why were African slaves treated so harshly by the Europeans?
2. How were slaves able to retain their culture? What aspects of their culture were they able to keep?
3. What were two ways that Africans resisted enslavement?
4. Think about the foods you have eaten in the past couple of days. Make a list of 10 of those foods that contain sugar.

Example 2. Archaeology Video Assignment

Name: _____ Date: _____

Today when we watched the video about the African Burial Ground, we saw **ARCHAEOLOGISTS** working on the ABG site.

1. Think about what you saw. On the lines below, write a description of what you observed. Be sure to include specific details. For example:

- What were archaeologists doing?
- What were they wearing?
- What tools were they using?

2. Think about the video and the description you have just written. In your own words, define what archaeology is.

Example 3. Math Homework

Chapter 5

Reinforcement

Practice 5-1

Add. Write each sum in simplest form.

1a. $\frac{7}{15} + \frac{8}{15}$ b. $\frac{7}{8} + \frac{5}{8}$ c. $\frac{8}{9} + \frac{5}{9}$

2a. $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{3}$ b. $\frac{3}{5} + \frac{3}{10}$ c. $\frac{1}{6} + \frac{1}{2}$

3a. $5\frac{1}{2} + 3\frac{1}{4}$ b. $2\frac{1}{6} + 3\frac{1}{2}$

4a. $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{3}$ b. $3 + \frac{1}{5} + 1\frac{7}{10}$

Subtract. Write each difference in simplest form.

5a. $\frac{5}{8} - \frac{3}{8}$ b. $\frac{11}{6} - \frac{5}{6}$ c. $\frac{19}{10} - \frac{7}{10}$

6a. $\frac{7}{8} - \frac{3}{4}$ b. $\frac{7}{10} - \frac{2}{5}$ c. $\frac{11}{12} - \frac{3}{4}$

7a. $3\frac{3}{4} - 1\frac{1}{2}$ b. $4\frac{6}{7} - 2$

8a. $5\frac{1}{2} - 1\frac{1}{5}$ b. $8\frac{7}{9} - 5\frac{1}{3}$

Add or subtract. Write each answer in simplest form.

9a. $\frac{7}{8} + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{3}{4}$ b. $10\frac{3}{4} - 4\frac{1}{3}$

Practice 5-2

Add. Write each sum in simplest form.

1a. $\frac{9}{12} + \frac{1}{5}$ b. $\frac{7}{20} + \frac{3}{8}$ c. $\frac{1}{7} + \frac{3}{4}$

2a. $\frac{3}{4} + \frac{5}{6}$ b. $\frac{2}{3} + \frac{6}{7}$ c. $\frac{4}{9} + \frac{3}{7}$

3a. $1\frac{5}{9} + 1\frac{3}{4}$ b. $10\frac{1}{3} + 4\frac{7}{8}$

4a. $6\frac{1}{8} + 8\frac{5}{6}$ b. $9\frac{1}{4} + 3\frac{2}{3} + 2\frac{2}{5}$

Subtract. Write each difference in simplest form.

5a. $\frac{4}{5} - \frac{2}{3}$ b. $\frac{8}{9} - \frac{3}{5}$ c. $\frac{5}{6} - \frac{2}{7}$

6a. $\frac{11}{12} - \frac{5}{8}$ b. $\frac{13}{15} - \frac{1}{6}$ c. $\frac{4}{7} - \frac{1}{5}$

7a. $3\frac{3}{5} - 1\frac{1}{4}$ b. $5\frac{7}{8} - 1\frac{2}{3}$

8a. $10 - 3\frac{2}{3}$ b. $9\frac{1}{4} - 5\frac{4}{5}$

9a. $3 - 1\frac{9}{10}$ b. $8\frac{2}{3} - 7\frac{9}{10}$

PROBLEM SOLVING

10. Steve weighs $67\frac{1}{4}$ lb. Mark weighs $\frac{3}{4}$ lb more. Find Mark's weight.11. Rachel sang for $1\frac{1}{3}$ h and danced for $\frac{3}{4}$ h. How much longer did she sing?12. On three hikes, Andrew walked $6\frac{1}{8}$ mi, $7\frac{1}{4}$ mi, and $12\frac{1}{2}$ mi. How far did Andrew hike altogether?13. The sum of two fractions is $\frac{11}{16}$. One fraction is $\frac{3}{8}$. What is the other?14. Liza has $\frac{4}{5}$ yd of ribbon. If she cuts off $\frac{3}{10}$ yd, how much ribbon does she have left?15. Jacob needs 8 pounds of apples. If he has already picked $3\frac{5}{8}$ lb, how many more pounds of apples must he pick?

Estimate. Use front-end estimation.

10a. $6\frac{5}{6} + 4\frac{1}{2}$ b. $8\frac{1}{6} - 3\frac{7}{8}$

11. $13\frac{4}{5} + 9\frac{1}{6} + 7\frac{9}{10}$

PROBLEM SOLVING

12. Jeanne is $10\frac{1}{2}$ years old. Her brother Jake is $6\frac{3}{4}$ years old. How much older is Jeanne?13. Maria rode her bike $2\frac{1}{3}$ mi to the store and then another $1\frac{4}{5}$ mi to the library. How far did she ride in all?14. Ellen ordered 6 pizzas for a party. Guests ate $4\frac{7}{8}$ pizzas. How much pizza was left over?15. The theater is showing a double feature. One movie lasts $1\frac{7}{8}$ h. The second movie lasts $2\frac{1}{4}$ h. Estimate the total length of the double feature.

Homework Survival Kit

Checklist of Materials and Supplies

Put a check mark by any of the supplies you think you need to do your homework. Add items not on the list on the lines provided. How many of each is needed?

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils | <input type="checkbox"/> Hole punch | <input type="checkbox"/> Compass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pens | <input type="checkbox"/> Stapler | <input type="checkbox"/> Protractor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors | <input type="checkbox"/> Dictionary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Note cards | <input type="checkbox"/> Paper clips | <input type="checkbox"/> Thesaurus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Colored pencils | <input type="checkbox"/> Folders | <input type="checkbox"/> Atlas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Markers | <input type="checkbox"/> Report covers | <input type="checkbox"/> Calendar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pencil sharpener | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-ring binder | <input type="checkbox"/> Notebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Erasers | <input type="checkbox"/> Rubber bands | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glue | <input type="checkbox"/> Simple calculator | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tape | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruler | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction paper | | |

Other Supplies

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Making Your Personal Homework Survival Kit

Have the student get a large shoebox, sturdy zip-lock bag, or other roomy container. The choice may depend on whether she wants to have the supplies with her in a backpack or at her home. It should be big enough to hold most of her supplies.

Work together to decorate the box or container, personalizing it to make it her own. Use stickers, puff paints, colored tape, markers, paper—whatever you have on hand.

Treasure Hunt

Once you have your checklist completed and have made a container, you can start putting the Homework Kit together.

Spend the next few days having the student find the supplies on the list. Mentors can offer suggestions for where to get some of the items for free (e.g., their school) or inexpensively (the Dollar Store).

When you get back together, go through the list and the supplies gathered. What supplies does the student already have? What is still needed? Make a plan for getting these additional items.

Adapted with permission from: *Connect! Learning Activities to Strengthen Assets*, by Sage Platt, Jill Pappas, Ellen Serfustini, & Kathleen Riggs (Cedar City, UT: Cedar Express Printing & Graphics, 1999).

Helping Your Mentee With Homework

RESOURCE LIST

Hundreds of Web sites offer homework help for students, some better than others. Many local libraries have Web pages devoted to helping students with homework assignments. School libraries are also excellent places to go to get recommendations for both Web and print resources.

Web Resources

The U.S. Department of Education has many useful online resources that are geared to parents but can easily be adapted for mentors working with their mentees. Most materials are available in English and Spanish.

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml?src=pn>

LEARNS provides training and technical assistance for literacy, tutoring, and mentoring programs. Their Web site offers an array of practical tips and thought-provoking articles to help literacy, tutoring, and mentoring programs enliven their sessions with students.

<http://www.nwrel.org/learns>

This issue of the LEARNS online newsletter *The Tutor* is devoted to homework help.

<http://www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/spr2005/spr2005.html>

A wealth of articles and resources on tutoring, homework help, learning concepts, and more.

<http://math-and-reading-help-for-kids.org/index.html>

Originally developed by Baylor University to train college students to mentor young adolescents, the Community Mentoring for Adolescent Development (CMAD) manual has

been revised and updated by MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. This section offers helpful information about study skills and tutoring.

http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/files/06_MentorTrng.pdf

Print Resources

These and other print resources are available for loan to ED Mentoring grantees from the National Mentoring Center library. Browse the catalog at <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/library.html>

Connect! Learning activities to strengthen assets. S. Platt, J. Pappas, E. Serfustini, and K. Riggs (1999). Cedar City, UT: Cedar Express Printing and Graphics.

Elements of effective mentoring: A mentor training manual for the in-school volunteer mentor. Creative Mentoring. (2001). Wilmington, DE: Author.

Making the grade: A guide to incorporating academic achievement into mentoring programs and relationships. A. Cannata, M. Garringer, P. MacRae, D. Wakeland (2005). Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center.