

Using Structure to Improve School Performance

We consider poor school performance to be a destructive adolescent behavior because it will often send children into a tail spin from which they may not recover. Children often do poorly in school because it is not something that interests them. When grades begin to fall and school report cards are sent home, children's self-esteem is usually the first casualty. With a little effort, kids can generally improve their grades, but because homework is not on "their list", they usually do not have enough self-discipline to do what is needed on their own.

If this dangerous trend is allowed to continue, kids often feel they are in too deep to pull themselves out. At this stage, children may lose all interest in school and attendance may begin to suffer. We are not just addressing the issue of school work here, but also diligence in life. The lessons children learn by consistently doing their homework can be successfully applied throughout life.

Idle hands make a man poor; busy hands grow rich.

Proverbs 10:4

(NEB)

Group Activity 3.4

Working with your support group, brainstorm a list of problems children may face when their grades fail, or they begin ditching classes.

1. *Example:* Loss of self-esteem
2. Association w/ "low life" friends
3. Loss of rights to other activities (ie. sports, etc)
4. Type cast as a troublemaker
5. Lose hope

I passed by the field of the sluggard, And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense; And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles, Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected upon it: I looked, and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest, Then your poverty will come in as a robber and your want like an armed man.

Proverbs 24:30-34

(NASB)

When parents first see their child's poor report card, they usually respond out of anger and frustration. Lectures and long restrictions of one to six months are common, but usually do not result in improved grades. At times like these children will often promise parents they will do better in school and the child may be sincere. Even though the child's intentions may be good, he probably does not have enough self-discipline to do his homework daily. Most children and teenagers learn to discipline themselves after parents have consistently held them accountable and withheld the *child's list* of privileges until the work or chore is completed. Although most children will complain at first, teenagers need a parent to check up on them from time to time.

The single most common problem with poor school performance is incomplete or inadequate homework. If the average student does his daily homework and attends class regularly, chances are the student will pass with at least a "C" grade.

When parents ask children if they have finished their homework, children typically respond:

- They did not have any homework assigned; or,
- They did their homework in class; or,
- They left their completed homework in their locker at school.

The problem of course, is by this time there is no possible way for the parent to check with the child's teacher to verify the story. Unless parents know the homework policy, the arguments will continue and grades will not improve.

★ To help children improve their grades, parents need:

- to ensure a Homework Assignment Checklist is completed each day;
- to approve their child's homework when it is completed;
- to control their child's list of things until the homework is done.

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The *Homework Assignment Checklist* is a simple tool parents can use to provide themselves with the necessary information about their child's homework. However, parents must still ensure the homework is complete and must withhold the activities their child wants to do, (such as watching TV or talking on the telephone), until the homework is complete. Parents must use the homework assignment sheet and control their *child's list* of activities on page 29 to be successful. Again, "catching your kid doing something right" applies here also. "Positive strokes" given when children make an effort to do their homework generally encourages children to try again.

Daily Homework Assignment Sheet

Student's Name: _____

Class/Period	Homework Assignment	Teachers Initials
1. _____		
2. _____		
3. _____		
4. _____		
5. _____		
6. _____		

Feel free to copy assignment sheet

When child is doing poorly in school

The Homework Assignment Sheet

For the child who needs help structuring their time.

This simple form is most effective when used as follows:

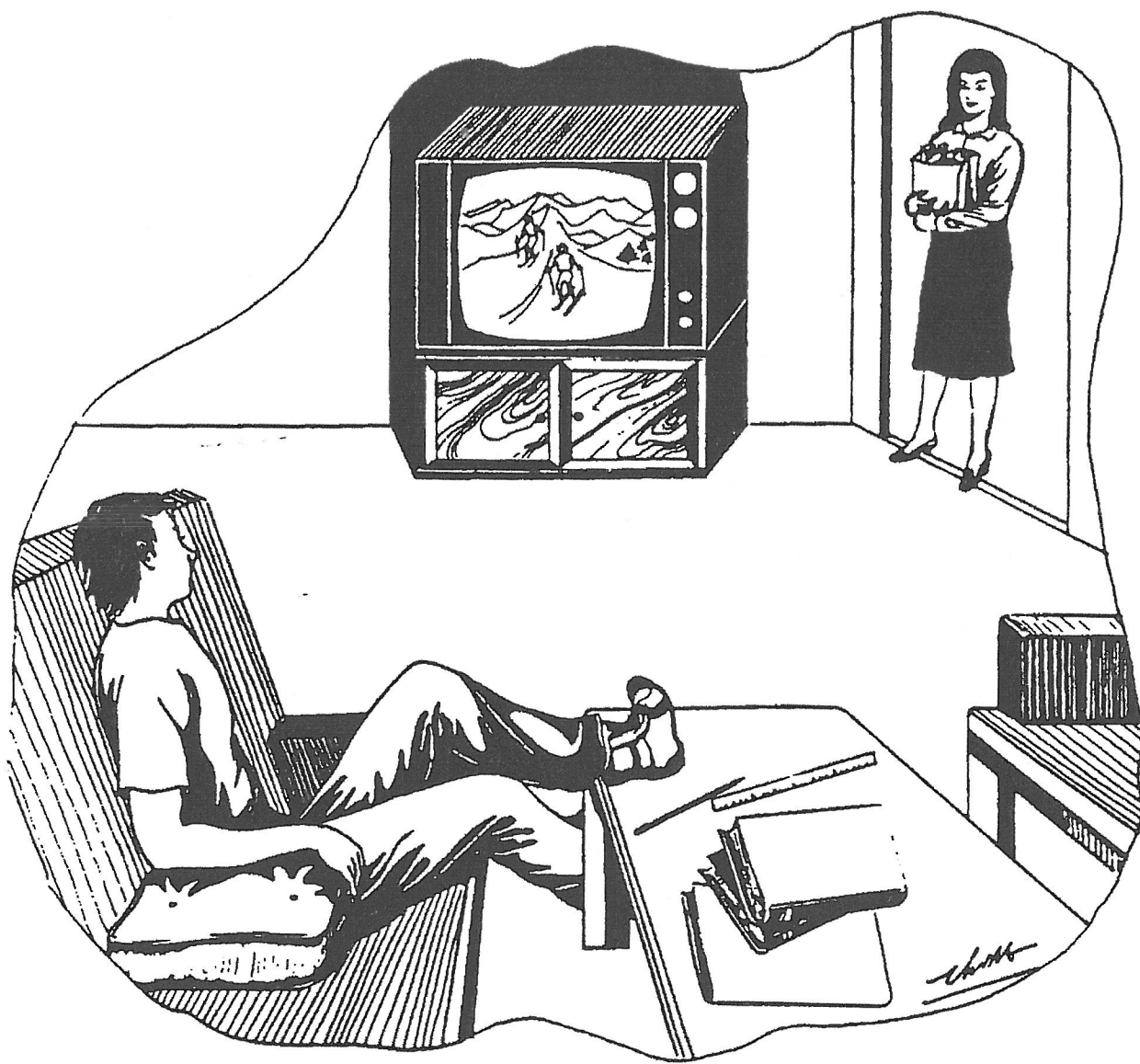
1. Each day the student takes one form with him and dates the form.
2. The student fills in the homework assignment for each class at the end of each period, **in ink**.
3. Before leaving class, the student shows the assignment sheet to the teacher who approves the homework assignment by initialing the box. (It is not the teacher's responsibility to fill out the form, only to initial the form.)

If there is no homework, the student is to write "none" in the box and still obtains the teacher's initials. Some students will write "none" in the box and forge the teacher's initials. Therefore, parents will need to occasionally contact the teacher to confirm the information.

Note: After several days one parent noticed the assignment sheet given her by her son looked strangely familiar. In fact, her fifth-grade son had been showing her the same assignment sheet and the same math homework for nearly three weeks!

Do this one day at a time .
Start fresh each day .

Parents should collect the homework assignment sheets daily. Parents should look over the homework when children report they have finished; this will help ensure the homework is complete. Children will complain at first, but will soon learn poor quality work will not get them the activities on *their list*.



"Robert, turn off the TV and bring me your homework assignment sheet."

Developing Homework Behavior

The *Homework Assignment Checklist* is designed to be an all-or-nothing system. That is, all the activities on your *child's list* (TV, stereo, telephone, friends, etc.) are only available after his homework is complete and not before. If a child does not bring the *Homework Assignment Checklist* home, then he is not allowed anything on *his list* for that one evening, including leaving the house or having friends visit.

This short-term (one day) consequence prevents children from feeling as if they are on "death row" with long restrictions of a week or more. In order to keep homework from piling up on children, parents should **not** expect homework to be made up. If a child is restricted for one night for failing to bring home the assignment sheet, that day's homework is lost forever.

Some children may openly agree to use the *Homework Assignment Sheet*, and forge their teachers' initials to avoid doing their homework. Therefore, parents should warn their children that if they forge a teacher's initials, the consequences will be the loss of everything on the *child's list* for an *entire weekend*. Parents will need to occasionally spot check to ensure the initials have not been forged.

If a child simply refuses to cooperate, it is the loss of the activities on *his list* which will eventually bring him to change his mind and do the homework. Lectures, angry shouting matches and threats only **slow** the process of change.

We change when we are tired of the way things are
Some kids will hold out
a long time.
or need to
go to the
long list.



