If your kids are struggling with homework, they're certainly not alone. But what's the best way to support them? There are many strategies you can use and their relevance will depend on your child's unique situation. I hope that among these, you'll find at least a handful that will make your — and your children's — afternoons easier.

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Be a detective.

If your child struggles with homework, there could be many, many reasons. To understand how best to help them, it will be useful to identify their specific barriers to success. Is it that they are too tired to do their homework when they are expected to do it? They aren't working in a quiet environment? They didn't actually write down what the assignment is? They don't understand it? They have trouble focusing long enough to finish it? They forget to bring home the necessary materials?

"There are so many points along the timeline where it can go wrong," King said. Ideally, you want to drill down into the specifics of what's causing their problems, so you can brainstorm solutions that will help them succeed. You can do this by asking questions — the less judgmental your tone, the better! — but another clever approach is outlined in the next strategy.

Figure out what's going on in the classes where your child is successful.

One way to uncover your child's barriers to success, King said, is to study what is happening in the classes where your child is doing well with homework. If they do great

with their math assignments, why might that be? Is the teacher writing down the assignment on the chalkboard, which makes it easier for your child to copy down and understand the instructions? Are the students asked to submit assignments online at home, so your kid can't forget to turn it in the next day at school? What can you learn from what's happening in the "good" classes that you could then request from your child's other teachers?

If your kid acts out or gets upset while doing homework, first offer empathy and validation.

It can be immensely frustrating when your child melts down when it's time to do homework. But remember that "behavior is communication," Branstetter said. They are "communicating in the way they know how that they need support — that a need is not being met."

Try to put yourself in their shoes. The last time you were really stressed, the last thing you needed was someone yelling at you or punishing you for feeling that way, Branstetter said. So in these moments, instead of getting upset, acknowledge your child's feelings. You might say, *This is challenging. I'm with you. And we're going to work through it together.*

Instead of nagging your child when they lose focus, get curious.

What if your kid is supposedly doing their homework, and then you look over and see they're drawing pictures instead? Instead of barking orders, pause and point out what you're noticing. "Walk in with, 'I noticed that your spelling is out, and you're coloring a picture of a Pokémon,'" Branstetter suggested.

At that point, your child might say they're bored, the homework is too hard, or they hate it. Then, based on what they say, you can move onto the next strategy.

Ask for their permission to try something new.

None of us likes being told what to do, and God knows that's especially true for kids. If your child is struggling to get their homework done, try asking for their permission to try a new approach. You might say something like, *Would you be willing to try something different with me?* Asking for permission is respectful and gives a child a sense of agency, which can make them more open to your ideas.

What might your strategy be? It depends on what you think your child might respond to and what the source of the problem is. If your kid says they find their homework boring, and they can't focus, you could try setting a timer and challenging your child to finish the work in five minutes. "A lot of kids with ADHD respond to gamifying," Branstetter said. Or maybe they say they're too tired to focus, and the strategy you suggest is to schedule a break and start homework a bit later.

Make a plan, test it out, and then evaluate it together.

If you or your child has a strategy to try, consider using what Branstetter calls the "Plan, Do, Evaluate" approach. Let's say your child suggests waiting until 9pm to start their homework because they're tired right after school. You can let them try that, as long as you evaluate the strategy afterwards. If it didn't go so well, you could say something like, *We waited until 9pm to do homework, but then you were stressed. Can we think of something else? Let's experiment with it. Let's play with maybe starting after dinner tomorrow.* Then, you evaluate how that goes.

Maybe your child doesn't want to study for the spelling test, and you suggest a specific learning approach, like *Let's spend five minutes using your spelling flashcards.* Then, you see how they do on their spelling test the next day and evaluate whether the strategy worked. "If they go back to school and they fail their spelling test, it's just data,"

Branstetter explained. You could say, *Okay, so looking at it for five minutes wasn't quite enough. Next time we have a spelling test, what can we do?* This is a non-judgmental approach for helping kids discover what works best for them and their brain.

Help your child anticipate how good it will feel to be finished.

Kids with executive functioning deficits can have trouble anticipating future rewards, which can affect their motivation. “The reason we push through doing something as adults is because we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, and we have that future sketch of ‘Oh, when I'm done, I can relax.’ Kids need help building that future thinking,” Branstetter said — and that’s especially true of neurodivergent kids. It can help to remind them how happy they’ll feel when their homework is done, and that they’ll feel that relief sooner if they focus on the task at hand.

If your kid has trouble focusing at home, see if they can do their homework at school.

Some neurodivergent kids find it difficult to do school work once they are home — the environmental transition gets them too far out of the school mindset. With these kids, it may help to have them stay at school late and finish their work there, King said. (In my kids’ school, students are able to stay at school an extra hour for homework help.)

If your kid struggles with online assignments, have them do them on paper first.

King pointed out that many neurodivergent kids do not do well with online work. “They get on their Chromebook and they are, like, all over the internet,” she said. She suggested that these kids do their work on paper and then upload it to Google Classroom once they’re done, if possible.

On the flip side, if your kid successfully does their paper homework but often fails to turn it in, ask if they can submit it online.

King said that many kids with ADHD do their homework but then forget to turn it in the next day. “It's super common for especially bright students with ADHD to have really high test scores and really low homework grades because they have a bunch of zeros. And then we find out later that all their homework is in their backpack,” she said. In these situations, it may help to ask the teacher if there is a way for them to submit the assignments online, so that they don’t have to keep track of the papers and remember to turn them in the next day.

Consider a tutor or educational therapist.

If you’re really struggling with your child’s homework, finding a tutor who will work one-on-one with your child may be worthwhile, King said.

A tutor doesn’t have to break the bank. As mentioned above, some schools offer free teacher-mediated extra help after school hours. If that’s not available, ask your child’s teacher for suggestions, or reach out to local community centers, hospitals or libraries. Educational therapists are another option: They often work with neurodivergent kids, and you can search for them here or here. There are also Children’s Dyslexia Centers in 13 states that provide free tutoring for kids with dyslexia.

If you’ve read this far, you have probably gleaned that there’s no one-size-fits-all approach for supporting kids who have trouble with homework — it really depends on them and their struggles. Once you have some ideas on what to work on, approach your child with empathy and respect, and consider your role to be less of a boss or adversary and more of an ally and fellow problem-solver. It’s about “being a thought partner and collaborating with your kid,” Branstetter said.