

# I've opted out of homework for my young children. Here's why, and how you can, too.

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Each year the complaints start to trickle in from friends and co-workers right around the second week of school: "Little Johnny has so much homework. In first grade! He's exhausted already." "I spend all of my free time after work trying to help my third-grader figure out his math homework. It leaves us both in tears." "There is just too much. Why is there so much? When I was a kid, we didn't have this many work sheets."

I support the sentiment behind these complaints. What I don't understand is why so many parents continue to go along with it.

This seems like a common sense and practical approach, yet many friends I've spoken with have not considered it, and they say, "What do you mean, opt out?"

Last year, my kindergartner was given a monthly calendar filled with daily assignments. I promptly emailed his teacher a version of the note I've sent on behalf of my older child for several years: "Dear [teacher]: My little guy sure adores you! I want to let you know that our family does not support homework for children in elementary school. Research indicates that it does not improve school performance, and I would rather my children have time for free play after a long day at school. As such, we are opting him out of homework. Please don't bother to send the work sheets home."

When I tell friends this, I'm met with incredulity, but it's not because they disagree. "Wait. You can do that? How can you do that? I thought homework was mandatory."

But the truth is, most teachers have agreed with me. Enthusiastically, in many cases. And not once has a teacher pushed back or insisted I make my child do homework. One teacher responded that he was thankful I sent the note, so he could share it with the district. Another informed me that she only gives so much homework because some parents protest if she doesn't properly train their children to commit to completing daily work sheets. How will they ever survive in the "real world?" these parents ask the teacher. We laughed together, but I was horrified.

For my 6-year-old and my 10-year-old, this *is* the real world. They are already working hard — learning everything from how to do fractions to how to share to how to stand up to bullies to how to not be a bully. By the time they get home each afternoon, they are thrilled to battle each other with light sabers, race in circles around the backyard, or sink onto the sofa with a book they have chosen. I can relate — most days I long to do that myself. I know I'm not alone at feeling

overwhelmed with my workload. So why, then, do grown-ups feel the need to push our smallest ones, who still find joy in pretend kitchens and climbing trees, into an adult world where homework is purportedly required to survive — or to succeed?

### *Too much homework? Some parents are just opting out.*

Some research has indicated that [homework is not helpful in elementary school](#) — and [could actually be harmful](#). Several years back, this conversation was rampant — and many parents and teachers pushed back to the point where districts started [banning homework](#). Yet a few short years later, the buzz is dying down, and it's business as usual for many of our small, overloaded kids.

Our district in a large metropolitan area is still issuing massive amounts of homework at some of its elementary schools. And few parents I know have considered opting out. As a child in the 1970s, I never had homework outside the occasional diorama, insect collection or balsa wood Viking ship. Yet somehow I managed to muster my way through high school, college and graduate degrees with great grades — and a love of learning that remained unhampered by rote memorization and painful work sheets.

I understand my privilege; school was fairly easy for me, and I was a teacher's kid who undoubtedly learned extra tidbits at home after school and all summer. But for those kids who need extra help or who lack support at home, I have seen no evidence that these constant homework assignments help. Instead, one could argue that all we are doing is adding an extra burden onto the shoulders of working parents who struggle to find enough minutes in the day to feed their kids, let alone practice spelling C-A-T after their tired child has spent seven hours in full-day kindergarten, and often after-care as well.

I imagine that there are still parents who think their kids need homework despite research that indicates otherwise. Here's what I say: You be you. I won't judge.

There is far too much judgment happening toward parents these days.

But to my friends who agree with me, yet are surprised by our ability to opt out, I say: Remember that you are the parents. Your opinion matters. And for every one teacher (if any) who may push back, I suspect there are another 10 who will cheer you on.

So give it a try. Instead of spending every free moment searching through your child's Thursday folder and weeping over all those pictures of clock faces with the hands pointing every which way, you can rejoice at the empty homework section. Then you'll have plenty of time to focus on the sneaky flier stuffed into the front: School Fundraiser! Don't forget to dress your child in a (very specific) (wacky) outfit (that no one actually owns) every day next week!

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