

Homework; Cornerstone Perspective

As we seek to write to you about the topic of homework we are keenly aware of the great homework debate! These are our thoughts around supporting your child's development of skills and habits with regards to homework and, at the same time, we want you to know that because we are in partnership with you and we have immense respect for that partnership, we embrace lots of variety as to how this will look for each family and each child.

In traditional settings much of the children's day is spent passively receiving information with which they will work that evening in the form of homework. In Montessori environments your children spend a very high percentage of their time actively engaged in learning. Even when they are in a presentation they are active, participating, cooperating, being challenged in the context, always, of community. In short, your child spends his day in an environment that is *demanding* his best. Pediatric Neuropsychologists advocate for environments that 'demand' a child's attention in all of these areas of development simultaneously for optimal brain development.

At Cornerstone we embrace this and during the school day your children have the opportunity to learn and practice a holistic, 360 degree development of their social, emotional, and academic '21st Century Skills'. Your child has the freedom to explore topics of interest and--at the same time--they have a responsibility to master the skills and concepts that they are required to know. When your child comes home she will likely be 'full' of her day and need time to assimilate all the experiences and concepts she's taken in. Paper and pencil homework upon arrival at home is likely not conducive to continued learning in a young child. There is a place for developing this skill with older children intentionally and with consideration to what is best for each child.

Children in Lower Elementary

In Lower Elementary, we ask that families support their children at home in the following areas.

Conversation about work and social interactions at school

We will be working to support this by giving ideas for questions that will prompt conversation around what's happening at school; these ideas will be coming to you in the Guide's news to you every two weeks. Asking open-ended questions rather than yes/no questions will spark conversation. Waiting until later in the evening is also a good way to get your child to talk more about school rather than asking how his day was when you pick him up or as he steps off the bus. You may enjoy this book as a resource for having meaningful conversations with your children! When you engage in these conversations you can ask your children for examples... or you can say, did anything like that ever happen at school? Here is the link:

https://www.amazon.com/Talk-Your-Kids-Conversations-Individuality-ebook/dp/B00DWK544W/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506371074&sr=1-4&keywords=things+to+talk+about+with+your+children

Work of the Home

This is the important work of being a member of a family and community and having time together. This includes activities of maintaining the home (cooking, dishes, laundry, shopping, cleaning, packing lunches, pet care, etc), as well as opportunities to be together (dinner, sports or other leisure activities, church, bedtimes, etc).

Reading

Reading is closely tied to school success in all areas and regular practice reading is an important habit to establish and maintain. We recommend no less than 20-30 minutes per day. There are many ways of reading at home, independently and together, and families might choose to use all of them at various times. Options include independent reading, reading aloud, parallel reading, and partner reading.

Children in Upper Elementary

In addition to continuing **conversation, work of the home and reading**, in Upper Elementary, we expect children's work at home will increase slightly. Children ages 9-12 are at the age that they can start to build good habits for academic work at home, and the support and repetition of skills should continue at home. We talk to children at school about their balance and variety of work and remind them that this should be true of their work at home as well.

Perhaps you have heard of the 10 minutes per grade level per school night guideline. At Cornerstone, we generally do not embrace arbitrary guidelines and prefer, as a rule, to consider what each child needs and, when we are considering homework, we consider that need in the context of family. In addition, just as each child is unique, each Guide is unique and will have slightly different recommendations with regards to work outside the home. Please know that our guides will always work with you about the right amount and right type of homework for your child.

There are good reasons to begin good habits around work at home; these are some of our favorites:

If a Child is Struggling

If a child is struggling to access the rich academics in a Montessori environment in any area due to a deficit in skills, it is especially important to plan how he or she will work on these skills at home.

Keyboarding

As children begin to use screens more to support their academic work, we start to practice keyboarding skills in school. This can be something that children work on at home as well; there are many apps and web based options for this.

Completion of Work/Time Management

There are times when children do not complete planned work during the school day. Children might assign themselves work to take home and finish, particularly if deadlines are approaching. If work was unfinished because of challenges with time management or responsibility at school, the lead guide may assign a child work to finish at home. We support this as a natural consequence of choices and as a growth opportunity in time management.

Math

We ask that upper elementary children work on math at home several times over the course of the week. Math is such an important growth area in upper elementary, particularly as children begin to move from work with Montessori materials to abstract understanding of concepts (more in 5th and 6th grades). We look at math work at home as the repetition and remediation needed to grow math skills, the chance to work toward meeting grade level standards, and a way to build math vocabulary. There are many different opportunities to practice math at home: IXL, word problems or family math coming from school, or math that the children choose to take home to reinforce concepts introduced at school. IXL is a web-based computer program designed around the Minnesota state standards that the school invests in for use at school and home. Each

child grades 3-6 has an individual account and can practice math on the computer, which helps them see math the way they will see it on state assessments. At school, we present the concept on the Montessori material next to the IXL screen to support the connection between concrete work and abstract representation. In addition, the children will be using the language of the standards and assessments in their record keeping to support fluency of testing vocabulary.

We would love to stay in conversation with you about homework and welcome, as always, your questions.

Here are a couple articles you may be interested in, as well.

<http://neatoday.org/2015/09/23/the-great-homework-debate-whats-getting-lost-in-the-hype/>

<http://time.com/4466390/homework-debate-research/>