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Homework: Enough Already!



Today a friend of mine shared a great article on Facebook by Heather Shumaker entitled, [Homework is wrecking our kids: The research is clear, let's ban elementary homework](#). It is a refreshing and educating read that presents good research on the cost/benefit relationship of homework on a child's academic success. It basically says we are engaging in nightly work that has no real benefit. I was stricken to expound on some additional thoughts that Heather touches on, namely, the emotional health and well-being of the

child and family. We as a culture have been sold an academic/business model of raising kids that emphasizes academic education as the most important factor in raising successful adults. We as parents are taught to be subservient to the academic arena that actually serves us. The problem is that academia is only one arena where my child will develop skills however, it is not the most important.

any successful endeavor I take on. Without the ability to regulate my emotions, I will not be able to apply myself to career development, healthy relationships, or engagement in pro-social community (just ask anyone who did a prison stint). Unfortunately, this skill is not developed while under constant stress. Placing a child under pervasive stress actually has the inverse affect, essentially creating low stress tolerance. More is not always better. This means that when your child succumbs to stress either by acting out or shutting down they are becoming more fragile, not stronger. Just look at the overall prevalence of ADHD or the poor test scores in underprivileged populations. What I am describing is a society of toxic stress. Toxic stress is prolonged exposure to stress without any relief. We have created a system of education and child rearing that is actually working against adult development and not for it by placing youth in state of toxic stress. In spite of teacher and parents best efforts under the current system, we are failing this generation and are reaping the consequences in our culture from the previous generation.

Fast forward to adulthood and you will find that young adults today are struggling in all areas that require adaptability, perseverance, and confidence. When you closely examine adults who are struggling in some area of life, it is rare that education is the greatest cause. Normally the problem lies in some fractured relationship either from their family of origin or current romantic relationship. Academic failure may be a symptom, but it is not the cause of adult dysfunction and lack of success. Access to education is an important right, but access to education without a well regulated stress system is a fruitless endeavor. Parents blame schools and expect them to raise their children, and schools hold parents accountable for lack of investment in academics, but that is not where the fight should be. The bureaucracy of education imposes curriculums on teachers just like we are imposed on with homework.

We are privileged in this country to have access to the greatest academic resources, but in pursuit of academics we fail the family system. Families in the United States are under a lot of pressure. This is a “first world” pressure, but pressure none-the-less. Economically we are forced in most cases to have two parents working and in many cases, we have single parents. Many of today’s children are in school for 7 hours followed by 2-3 more hours of daycare or after school programming. Families are afforded maybe 2-3 hours per day to

a job full of tasks to complete and less of a relational exercise. Getting through the day without a fight is the mark of a great day.

Like all jobs parenting comes with performance measurements and other stressors. Our view of our own performance becomes how well our children are able to comply with the measuring stick that our society has provided. Unfortunately this measuring stick is grades and test scores. Teachers are held to test score standards and parents measure their children by grades. This measuring stick was not created by us, yet we feel extremely guilty as we hold up our in-home performance to what is considered normal expectations. Considering factors that are not immediately changeable such as the need to work and provide for my family and a need to go to school, my attention should turn to the low hanging fruit. In this case the low hanging fruit is homework. Not so much because it is bad in itself, but because of what it represents which is an imposition on family's ability to be successful and successful families are marked by relationship not by the average IQ or GPA of its members.

Although our culture continues to change its expectations for what is so called "normal," children in their first 10 or so years of life have basic physiological needs that demand a certain attention. These needs do not compromise based on cultural expectations. They merely adapt to what they are presented with. This can be detrimental if they are asked to live in a constant state of stress that academic and economic expectations place on us. What they require most, is bonding time with parents and family, a time that society is not affording us freely. They require attachment to a parenting/caregiver system that loves unconditionally, responds to their discomfort with relief, and creates a space of calm in their lives. Children in our culture are put through stress all day and then when they finally get to the place of sanctuary we call the home, they are met with more expectations and stress.

When I think of the irreplaceable importance of family attachments in teaching stress regulation, sense of self, and overall well-being coupled with my limited ability to engage my child in organic daily relationship engagement, the last thing I need is the imposition of an external pressure to hijack my time with my children. Homework in elementary

that affect families, but homework is one of those targets that I feel is more within our

control. The issues that I am taught to believe are important are those measured by academics. This distraction is creating a conflict in most families. Force my children to fight through homework at the expense of relationship building or risk getting bad grades and missing society's mark.

The research reported on in Shumaker's article states that academics are not helped by homework in elementary. That is a significant factor if your primary child rearing responsibility is to raise kids who get good grades. Although I am my child's biggest cheer leader in academic performance, my primary concern is for their emotional well-being. I would rather have a minimum wage adult child who is well liked, good to their family, and grounded than an emotional train wreck that is constantly in search of identity and the elusive happiness that seems out of reach for most adults. I will continue to insist that my home and my family time will not resemble my work life and I will challenge, however passively or actively I need to resist any force that attempts to steal my relationships with my family. If that means I have a well-regulated and emotionally stable C student then so be it.

Ryan Breen LCPC, MISA I, CCTP is a psychotherapist in Chicago, IL who works specifically with couples and those who's relationships are negatively effected by childhood trauma, addiction, and infidelity. For more about his work visit www.couplescrisiscounseling.com and like [Kindred Love - Caring About Couples](#) on Facebook.

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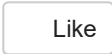
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Ryan Breen LCPC, MISA I, CCTP / March 7, 2016

3 thoughts on “Homework: Enough Already!”

 **Survivors Guilt**

March 9, 2016 at 10:32 pm

First off I have to say this is a good article that I enjoy reading that hits all of the reasons I took my kids out of the public school system.

As for public schools one of the things I found lacking was for my oldest daughter, the constant stress of having to achieve a grade or something bad like recess would be taken away just destroyed her self esteem. Rather than encouraging her to achieve in school she just saw it as an impossible goal she could never obtain then believed she was too stupid. I also noticed that taking away her recess time started to produce unhealthy habits like all work and no play or self worthlessness so she wouldn't even try. With the all work she began to try to prove her value through achieving. Instead of dealing with her stress by having some sort of balance where she enjoyed life and took care of responsibilities. Altogether made her an unhappy child.

As for homework it was difficult on both my children. After 2 pm their learning time is spent. They can barely focus on homework let alone absorb what's being taught in the homework. So it seems kind of useless. To make matters worse it was a constant fight with them because they were tired already from the 6-7 hours of school and just wanted to relax now. How can anyone expect kids to absorb something they see as boring and taking away from their fun time. The point of school should be to teach kids and keep the knowledge they are taught, not to teach as much as we can and pray it sticks.

So what I have found that in school teaching them the basics such as math, english, science and history while at the same time giving them recess helps in a lot of ways. For one their learning the basics but while having that break it gives them time to recover and recharge for their next assignment. Secondly it helps to teach some sort of balance in stress. That we work but we also need to have play time too otherwise we can't deal with these emotions that come along. If there is nothing fun in our lives there isn't much to say "well at least I have this good memory to be grateful for" or "at least I can look forward to this fun event after this hard work is accomplished".

So what I have done in regards to teaching my children is they do no more than 5 hours of teaching a day. In those 5 hours they are learning what they need to for the basics and they

get their fun time which is spent with their friends or on playing games with mom and

dad, they do get some TV time but we limit that. We also teach about emotions and how to handle emotions. With all of these changes my oldest was behind in school by two years, in just one year she is caught up in school, she is holding on to the knowledge as well, and she is showing signs of seeing her own value and knowing what it is she wants from life and being able to work through and talk about some of the painful emotions she struggles with. She is also able to bake wonderful cakes with confidence and draw better than I could. My youngest daughter is a grade ahead of where she should be, she also has self confidence, is able to express how shes feeling within her age range, and she is able to play piano and cook little things like eggs and mac n cheese. But the most important part for both of them is that they both are able to enjoy life and feel comfortable and able to express themselves and how they feel. They dont just block all of the emotions out to keep pushing forward or make anyone happy, they do their best to understand themselves and what their feeling so they can move forward with learning how to deal or heal from what ever caused the emotion in the first place. I find that is so much more important to their lives, because i have noticed that when their emotions, value, or self opinion struggle so then does their school work or ability to learn. None of that is to say my little family is perfect, we just found what works for us.

Not everyone can homeschool, but i enjoyed this article because it is right on with some of the problems that are happening with schools. I noticed it with my children. Home work does not help much and as I said before the children just dont seem to absorb what their being taught with homework, it is more important for parents to spend more of their time and effort in teaching their kids the stuff schools just cant teach. Things like relationships, self esteem, dealing with emotions, and just letting parents spend fun time with their kids. Not fighting with them to do their homework. Schools cant teach children these things because they dont know our children as well as parents do, nor do they have the time to. Plus it is a personal thing with each family, one family might want Christian values taught and another might want Mormon values taught. Taking homework out of the picture of course wont solve all problems but will help. This is just my opinion in the experiences I have had with teaching and raising children.

 Like

March 10, 2016 at 3:21 am

Thank you so much for your feedback and personal testimony. It takes a lot of courage to make a decision to not only home school your children but to do it in holistically healthy way. It's very inspiring for me to read your story and see evidence of people who do what's right, regardless of society's norm. As a parent all we can do is our best and provide every opportunity for our children to succeed. So much is left out of our control. It seems like you have laid out a recipe for, that coupled with love, will really afford your kids every opportunity for well rounded success. Best wishes to you and your family.

 Like



Kristy

March 12, 2016 at 6:39 am

Great article. But a clarification. Mormon values are Christian values. The doctrine might be different but Mormons like other Christian focusing on following Christ and trying to emulate his life. 😊

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