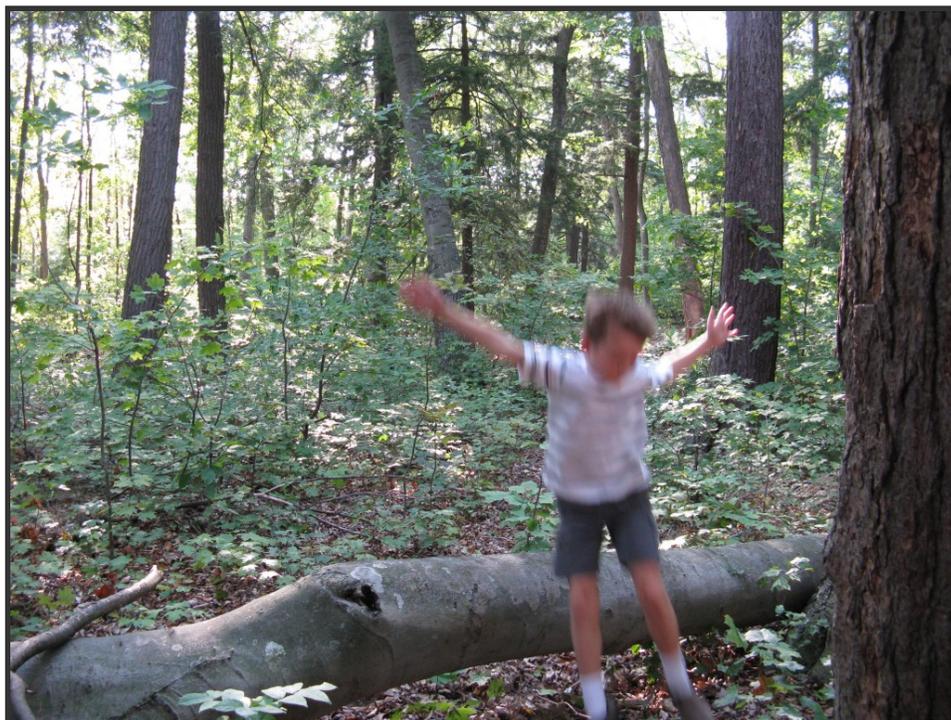


Starlighting Mama

"Up before dawn writing and reaching for the stars while the kids are still sleeping."

Why We Say "NO" to Homework

Posted on [September 12, 2012](#) by [Heather Shumaker](#)



I care about my kids' learning. That's why I say tree forts win over homework.

It's back-to-school time. Time to write THAT letter again. The letter to my child's new teacher that explains **why our family bans homework**.

That's right. I *care* about my children's learning. That's why I believe tree forts win over homework. Quite simply, I believe homework has no place in a young child's life.

The trouble is, the American education system doesn't agree with me. Homework starts in preschool in many cases, and it only goes up from there. They even establish quotas: Ten minutes per grade. My son's in third grade now, which means thirty minutes a day. What a surefire way to get kids to hate school. Elementary-aged kids don't need homework. For seven hours they've had to focus on the academic sides of their brains with grown-ups telling them what to do. When school's out, it should be OUT. Kids need time to get other needs met.

What do kids need? Time outside. Time with family. Time goofing around and picking their nose. Time pursuing their own interests. Time doing family chores. And an early bed. There you have it: Play, family time and sleep. My kids get 10-11 hours of sleep each night. Instead of homework, kids would do much better in school if they got their full quota of sleep and were in bed by 7:30 or 8pm.

Here's what my children spent their time doing after school yesterday:



Logs in the park...

- Building tree forts
- Dancing on logs
- Running
- Jumping
- Negotiating game rules with other kids
- Prying with levers
- Hunting for toads



Prying with levers...

I don't know yet how our third grade teacher will respond. What the principal will say. So far we've been lucky and our unusual stance has been met with puzzled acceptance. We don't mean to be trouble-maker parents. We just mean to stand up for our children's learning by giving them space and time to roam.

Here's a copy of the "anti-homework" letter if you'd like to read more:

"Dear _____,

Can we talk? We'd like to support you in the classroom, and at this early stage I don't know your views on homework, but...

I don't believe in homework for children ages 11 or under. Homework becomes important in high school, with a year or two of "practice" homework in middle school. I know that's not how most of American education works right now.

As a parent, perhaps you understand. There is such a short amount of time in every day. School learning takes up most of the day, and when school is out kids need space and time for other things.

My son gets home around 4pm. He gets into pajamas around 8pm. In those short four hours, he –

Has an after-school snack, talks and unwinds from his day
 Plays/ pursues his own interests
 Goes outside and climbs in tree forts
 Giggles with his brother
 Does family chores
 Practices piano
 Has a family supper
 Reads his own book and listens to a bedtime story

These are all more important uses of his time, or any young child's time. My view is homework interrupts home learning. Homework tends to give school /learning a bad name and when given too young, kids learn to resent it instead of value it. Kids don't need to "practice" the routine of homework. That can come much later, in middle school.

The only type of "homework" I value at this age is reading at home. In our family we already do this every day.

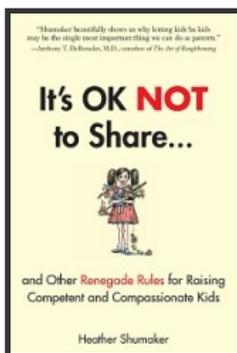
When homework does become important, I view it as the child's responsibility. We will take an interest in what our kids learn in school, but not tell them to do it. No parent signatures signing off on assignments, etc. I also don't believe in the practice of adding 10 minutes a day per grade, or any arbitrary amount of time. Learning doesn't work by filling a quota of minutes.

I realize this is not the prevailing view in education right now, and perhaps flies in the face of the school's policies or your own ideas. Can we talk? I'd like to find something that's comfortable for everyone and make sure your goals are supported as well as ours."

Well? What to you think? Would you do the same? It takes courage to buck the system, but childhood is worth it.



We say "no" to homework and "yes" to dancing on logs.



Now you can [read MORE about homework](#), banning homework and opting out for your family or classroom in the new book: [It's OK to Go Up the Slide](#). Learn more at heathershumaker.com.

Starlighting Mama is the blog of author Heather Shumaker, the "renegade" parent behind [It's OK Not to Share](#) and [It's OK to Go Up the Slide](#) published by Tarcher/Penguin. Curious about what happened? Read the post [Homework Letter Update](#) or other [homework posts](#).

