

How parents' support and emotional guidance shape homework success

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New research from Hebrew University shows that how well parents understand their children and manage their own emotions greatly affects homework time. Parents who are good at understanding their kids are

more supportive and help them become more independent and motivated to learn. On the other hand, parents who have trouble managing their emotions are more likely to act negatively, which can make it harder for children to stay engaged and do well in their learning.

Researchers at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have uncovered new insights into the mechanisms that contribute to parental ability to [support](#) their children academically. Led by Dr. Naama Gershny and Ph.D. student Racheli Cohen from the School of Education, in collaboration with Prof. Maayan Davidov from the School of Social Work and Social Welfare, the study explored why so many [parents](#) struggle to support their children during [homework](#).

The research shows that parents' emotional and [cognitive processes](#) can greatly influence their interactions with their children during homework time. By studying 101 Israeli parents and their elementary-aged children, the researchers identified factors that can either help or hinder the support parents provide at home.

The [paper](#), titled "Why Things Can Go Wrong When Parents Try to Help Children With Their Homework: The Role of Parental Emotion Regulation and Mentalization," is now published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

Children usually spend about one to two hours a day on homework, but this varies with age and school demands. Many parents find it challenging to balance their own responsibilities while supporting their children academically, which can lead to stress and conflict. Improving this dynamic is crucial.

One key finding is the role of parental mentalization—the ability to perceive and interpret their children's thoughts and feelings. Parents who are good at mentalization are more supportive and less controlling,

creating a better homework environment that can boost children's independent learning and motivation.

Conversely, parents who struggle with managing their emotions tend to express negative behaviors, like frustration or discouragement, which can make homework stressful and curtail their child's engagement.

"Our research sheds light on how parents' emotional and mental processes impact their involvement in their children's education," explained Dr. Gershy. "Understanding these factors can help develop strategies that improve parent-child interactions during homework, and hence increase parental ability to support and encourage their [children's](#) learning."

Practical applications of these findings could include parent training programs and educational strategies to improve parents' awareness of their [emotional states](#) and mentalization skills, aiming to enhance parental support and foster better academic outcomes and relationships.

More information: Racheli Cohen et al, Why things can go wrong when parents try to help children with their homework: The role of parental emotion regulation and mentalization, *Journal of Educational Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/edu0000873](https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000873)

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