

When Your Child Has a Big School Project

When your child tells you he/she must come up with a project for the school “science fair” or complete some other large-scale assignment, that may be another way of asking for your help. You can help your child get organized – in the process, he/she will learn how to manage a big project and know what to do next time.

Understand the assignment. Go over with your child whatever materials he/she has that describe the project. Talk about it until he/she can sum up the project in clear terms. If you have questions or concerns, this would be a good time to contact your child’s teacher to get clarification.

Divide the project into smaller tasks. Almost every big project seems a lot simpler once it is broken into smaller tasks. Work with your child to discuss the smaller tasks that are necessary to finish the project. Work with your child to decide the order in which these tasks must be completed. Have your child write this information down.

Make a chart of timelines. The best way to make certain your child has ample time to get everything done is to predict how much time you will need. When you plan, work backwards so you know when each part of the project needs to be started. It’s a good idea to leave a little extra time for each stage of the project just in case of delays or other problems. Make a calendar that marks these timelines.

Prepare a list of “tools.” Work with your child to figure out what he/she will need to finish the project. Will the project require a trip to the library for books and reference materials? Will your child need photos or illustrations? If so, where will your child find them? Will the final product be a poster, a report, or something else?

Monitor your child’s progress. As your child completes smaller parts of the project, help him/her stay on track. Check to see if your child is meeting the timelines that the two of you set. Offer your child some ideas to help keep him/her on course, but don’t lead your child to believe that you will do the work for him/her.