

Because it's not my homework

The other day I spilled something in the kitchen and I said out loud, “What is wrong with me?”

And our older son said matter-of-factly and without a note of criticism, “There’s just one thing wrong with you, Mama. You forget things sometimes.”

Well, that’s for sure (though I certainly have other flaws, too). Maybe that’s part of the reason why when it comes to homework, I let our second grader take the lead. I take a very hands-off approach. And the more I read about parents’ involvement in their children’s lives, I get the sense that’s not the norm.



Now I enjoy doing things for our children. I love teaching them whatever I can about the world, packing their lunches, and even triple-knotting their soccer cleats. And I don’t mind helping with homework—which is good since we have a kindergartener, too, and he can’t do all his work alone.

But second grade is a different story. Our second grader can read and he’s quite capable. I will cheer him on, be a resource for the difficult questions, and support him. But he knows it is his homework, not mine.

So I don’t read the assignment. I don’t watch him write his words or stand nearby as he completes his math. Sure, my husband and I take turns quizzing him on spelling words. But I don’t check the teacher’s website to see what the assignment is for the day. He has it in his student planner.

I ask him whether his homework is done. He says yes. I usually look it over so he can show me his work, because he’s proud of it.

If the next day he finds that it’s not complete or he made a mistake, maybe tomorrow’s lesson will be better than one I would teach—about responsibility, about attention to detail, about reading more closely.

His teacher is kind. She isn’t going to make him feel bad. Even people who aren’t second graders make mistakes, and the safety net is bigger now than it will ever be.

If he is going to learn responsibility, this is the ideal time. In fact, as I look ahead to the upper

grades, it seems to be the only time.

We started this approach last year. I realized that homework had become a nuisance, but it didn't have to be. If I treated it as his homework and not my assignment to give him, there were fewer battles. Life was simpler. And we fell into this rhythm.

Is his homework always done perfectly? Maybe not. But when it isn't, it is his lesson to learn.

And, when it is well-done, the cheerful words written in the margins are not for a hovering mother who worries about whether we interpreted the assignment correctly. That praise belongs to our son, and only to him, just as it should.