The Effects of Parent Monitoring on Homework Completion of Low Performing Students

del Carmen Barocio
THE EFFECTS OF PARENT MONITORING ON HOMEWORK COMPLETION OF LOW PERFORMING STUDENTS

by

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Four junior high school boys from a Special Education room participated in this study. The purpose was to increase the amount of homework completion having parents as monitors of their own children and minimal teacher intervention. In Condition I, baseline was taken of the percentage of homework assignments completed. During Condition II, parents received a Homework Checklist from the teacher explaining the assignments for the next day. For Condition III parents were given a handout explaining the use of positive statements and prompts, and a guideline for skillful home study was also included. Parents were asked to send a Report Card to the teacher about their children's school-related behavior at home. Only the data from one of the students shows a shift from zero to 100% of homework done from the second condition to the end of the study. Several reasons for the differences in performance are analyzed and suggestions for future investigation are given.
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Maria del Carmen Barocic
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................... ii
LIST OF FIGURES .............................................. iv
INTRODUCTION ................................................ 1
METHOD ...................................................... 8
Subjects and Setting ........................................ 8
Materials ..................................................... 9
Dependent Variable ......................................... 10
Experimental Design ......................................... 11
Procedure .................................................. 11
RESULTS ...................................................... 13
Reliability ................................................... 14
Estimates of Quality ......................................... 14
Time Spent in Homework .................................... 14
DISCUSSION .................................................. 17
APPENDIX A. Homework Checklist .......................... 23
APPENDIX B. Parents' Daily Report Card ................. 25
APPENDIX C. Teacher's Daily Report Card ............... 28
APPENDIX D. Parents' Guide for Homework ............. 31
BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................ 36
LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure
- 1. Percentage of homework assignments completed by each of the four subjects . . . . . . . . . . . . 15

iv
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to increase the amount of homework completion having parents as monitors of their own children and minimal teacher intervention.

Although a frequent focus for these therapeutic programs has been the treatment of disturbing "pathological" behaviors, such as fire-setting (Holland, 1969), sleep-walking (Clement, 1979), and self-injurious behavior (Merbaum, 1973), the area has expanded in recent years to include the training of parents of normal children in the management of school-related and other home behaviors (Gardner, Forehand, and Roberts, 1976; Peed, Roberts, and Forehand, 1977).

The justification for training parents in modifying school-related behavior is based on the reality that parents are always involved in the influence process anyway. Moreover, parents are the major source of interpersonal reinforcement in the home, while in both school and institution a variety of sources of reinforcement is available. Thus, it is important to exploit the impact of parental behavior so as to develop greater positive control over these powerful reinforcement contingencies which are a natural feature of a child's social environment.
O'Dell (1974) reviewed more than 70 articles that employed behavior modification principles to assist parents in dealing with their children. The major contribution of studies in this area has been to empirically demonstrate the functional relationship between parental contingencies and child behavior.

Noncompliant behavior in children has been extensively controlled at home through the training of parents in behavioral principles. Forehand and King (1977) successfully trained eleven mothers to modify noncompliance, tantrums and attention-seeking behavior of their children. Mothers were trained to increase the frequency and range of social rewards, to use praise and physical contact for appropriate behavior, and to use time out for noncompliance and inappropriate behavior. The results at a three-month follow-up indicated the maintenance of child compliance.

Baum and Forehand (1981) examined the long term maintenance effects of a parent training program. Thirty-four mother-child pairs participated in a program which consisted in teaching parents the use of rewards for compliant behavior and time out for noncompliance and inappropriate behavior. The results of the follow-up indicated that child behavior change and parents perception of change were still maintained 1 to 4.5 years after the treatment. These and other studies (Johnson and Lobitz, 1974; Forehand, Sturgis, McMahon, Aguar, Green, Wells and Beiner, 1979; Forehand, Wells, and Griest, 1980) support
support the idea that parents can be successful agents of change of undesirable behavior at home. Furthermore, it was found that the rate of child noncompliant behavior, parental negative responding, and parental commands, were significantly related. Comparative studies of clinic-non-clinic parent-child interactions have indicated that parents of non-deviant children apparently do not use a high rate of positive reinforcers with their children (Forehand, King, Peed, and Yoder, 1975; Green, Forehand, and McMahon, 1979; Lobitz and Johnson, 1975). Based on these results, one aspect of this study intends to increase the number of positive statements that parents make to their children to enhance the likelihood of engaging in school-related behavior at home.

More recently, a series of studies has investigated the effectiveness of parents as tutors of their children. Rayback and Staats (1970) trained parents as behavior therapy technicians in treating reading deficits in their children. Broden, Beasley, and Hall (1978) increase in-class spelling performance through a home tutoring program conducted by a parent. These studies again have demonstrated the important role played by the parent in the academic achievement of their children.

The literature about homework as a school-related behavior at home is controversial. Some articles present evidence that homework is a positive factor in learning while other articles based on apparently equally valid research indicate that children are not helped through homework.
However, Goldstein (1960) by reviewing more than 280 articles published in 30 years about the effectiveness of homework, found that the data in most of the studies suggest that regularly assigned homework favors higher academic achievement, and a few of the best designed experiments show this quite early.

Some of the studies showed that a no-homework policy in the elementary grades adversely affected academic performance in high school. Study techniques and attitudes are known to become established, for good or bad, very early in the child's school career. The effects of regular homework on study habits, independent work skills, and the development of self-discipline are its main justification.

Goldberg, Merbaum, Even, Getz and Safir (1981) worked with four groups of mothers to investigate the effectiveness of communication between school and home. They compared the operant approach (direct contingent intervention). The results indicated that the operant groups significantly improved in the quantity and quality of homework performance, but the assumption that improved homework behavior would lead to more scholastic achievement in target areas was not directly confirmed.

Harris and Sherman (1974) studied the effects of assigning homework on students' subsequent classroom
performance, and the relationship between the accuracy and completion of homework with classroom performance. Their results indicated that homework alone had little effect on subsequent classroom performance but the use of consequences for accurate completion of homework and/or accurate classroom performance produced relatively high completion and accuracy of homework and improved accuracy on classroom performance.

More recently, Keith (1982) analyzed the variables related to student achievement and found that the amount of time spent on doing homework was an important determiner of student grades. However, he also found that homework assignments were not generally completed.

Blakeman (1979) studied the effects of homework assignments, parent prompts, and contingency contracting on classroom spelling accuracy of handicapped students. The results indicated that contracting for classroom accuracy and/or contracting plus error remediation produced significant increases in classroom spelling accuracy but homework assignments did not produce any significant effects. She suggests future investigations to be directed in finding out the best ways to do homework.

Shockley (1964) and Strang (1968) pinpointed some of the favorable factors in home study: 1) keeping a record of the assignments to avoid forgetting something, 2) having a clear understanding of the assignment, 3) scheduling a
definite time for studying, 4) finding a definite place to study and 5) having the necessary materials at hand before starting to study.

In conclusion, looking at all the reasons given for assigning homework, one can see that in theory homework is an essential ingredient in order to develop a well rounded person. Some of those reasons are (LaConte, 1981; Langdon, 1969; Epps, 1966):

1. Homework strengthens what was learned in the classroom by providing the opportunity of practice and application to new concepts.
2. Home study allows the student to complete unfinished class assignments and make up work missed during absences.
3. Homework provides a background for classroom activities by allowing the students to preview work that is to be taken up in the near future.
4. Homework supplements the materials given in class with projects that cannot be done in the classroom.
5. Home study gives the pupil the experience of working by himself. It stimulates voluntary effort, initiative, independence, responsibility, and self-direction.
6. Homework brings the school and home closer together by acquainting parents with what the child is learning in school and by inviting their help.
Theories of Learning (Hilgard and Bower, 1975) also contains some principles closely related to the activities involved in homework which determine the acquisition of skills. First, the stimulus-response theory emphasizes the significance of the learner's responses, "Learning by doing" is still an acceptable slogan, and recommends that the learner should be an active rather than a passive listener or viewer. Second, the frequency of repetition is still important in acquiring a skill and insures enough overlearning to increase retention. Third, generalization and discrimination suggest the importance of practice in varied contexts, so that learning will become (or remain) appropriate to a wider (or more restricted) range of stimuli.

Consequently, especially for low performing students, homework provides at least the practice and drill necessary to strengthen the skills or information covered in class.

Homework is defined in this study as any work related to school learning done outside the classroom, outside the regular school-work hours, and not under the immediate and direct supervision of the teacher. This study intends, then, to increase the likelihood of homework completion through the training of parents in selection of the best environment for doing it, combined with the use of prompts, positive reinforcements, and parent-teacher homework checklists.
METHOD

Subjects and Setting

The subjects were four 14-year-old boys attending a special education room in a junior high school. They were selected because they showed a deficiency in the quantity and quality of homework preparation. Subject 1, a student from 7th grade, had a history of family problems. During the course of this study he was living with an aunt who was unable to control his behavior. Subject 2 was a student from 8th grade living at home with his mother and stepfather. His behavior at school had been described as easily distracted, unpredictable, and difficult to control. Subject 3 had once been labeled emotionally impaired, presenting disruptive behavior and difficulties to be controlled. He was referred to a juvenile home for several weeks, but at the time of present study he was on probation living at home with his parents. He was a student from 7th grade. Subject 4, 8th grade, had a history of family problems and he is expected to be in the care of foster parents in the future.

The nature of this study was explained to the parents/tutors of the four students and they were asked to sign an informed consent form.
Materials

The Homework Checklist was completed by the teacher by filling-in the blanks specifying the homework assigned for the next weekday (see Appendix A).

The Parents' Daily Report Card included a scale ranging from "not done" in one extreme to "completed" at the other, on which parents noted the status of daily homework for their child. The card had also a place for recording the time homework was both started and finished, a place to indicate whether or not they had prompted their child, and several lines for additional comments about their children's school-related behavior. Along with the report card, parents received typed instructions on how to fill them out (Appendix B).

The Teacher's Daily Report Card was completed by the teacher and included six cells describing the percentage of homework done by the student. The teacher estimated the percentage of homework handed in and checked one of the cells. It also contained a scale of accuracy rating ranging from poor to excellent where the teacher estimated the level of accuracy of homework (Appendix C).

A handout for parents giving instances and noninstances of positive statements for school-related behavior, a guideline to skillful home study, and general reminders to do homework (Appendix D).
The development of these materials was based on the information provided by a number of different authors (Atkinson and Forehand, 1979; Barth, 1979; Becker, 1971; Blakeman, 1979; Bornstein, and Hamilton, 1978; Forehand and King, 1977; Goldberg, Merbaum, Even, Getz, and Safir, 1981; McMahon and Forehand, 1978; Nelson, 1980; Preisig, Perrez, and Patry, 1981; Roberts, McMahon, Forehand, and Humphreys, 1978; Shockley, 1964).

Dependent Variable

Homework, for the purpose of this study, is defined as any work related to school learning done outside the classroom, outside the regular school hours, and not under the immediate or direct supervision of the teacher.

According to the above definition, the dependent variable was the percentage of homework completed in conformity with the Homework Checklist. The parent reviewed the homework done by the student, filled out the Parents' Daily Report Card and sent it with the child to the school each day.

The teacher also reviewed whether or not homework was completed and determined the percentage of homework done. The teacher was also asked to report the accuracy of homework completed. These data were recorded in the Teacher's Daily Report Card which was given to the experimenter everyday.

Reliability of homework completion and quality was
assessed by the experimenter since she was attending the Special Education room while this project was taking place.

Experimental Design

Three different conditions were introduced sequentially to each of the four subjects within a multiple-baseline-across-subjects design (Hersen and Barlow, 1976). The duration of each condition was two weeks.

Procedure

I Baseline. At the beginning of this condition, the nature of the study was explained to the teacher who was asked to complete the Teacher's Daily Report Card (see Appendix C) every day giving data on both quality and percentage of homework done. Although parents were informed of the nature of this study and had given their consent to participate, they were not aware of the beginning of this condition.

II Homework Checklist. The Checklist (see Appendix A) was completed by the teacher and sent to the parent/tutor daily. In order to assure that parents were indeed receiving the Checklists they were asked to sign them and send them back the next day. The teacher continued completing the Report Cards (see Appendix B).
III Positive Statements. Before the introduction of this condition, each of the four parents were contacted and visited by the experimenter. The purpose of this visit was to give the parents the handout with the guidelines for skillful home study, instances and noninstances of positive statements and examples of general reminders to do homework (see Appendix D). They also received a set of Parent's Daily Report Cards, and the way to fill them out and send them to the experimenter were verbally explained. This home visit gave the experimenter the opportunity to determine if the place selected for homework fulfilled the characteristics given in the handout. Parents also had the opportunity to discuss particular problems about their children's school-related behavior at home and received advice from the experimenter concerning behavior modification techniques. These problem-solving conditions were not applied in a systematic way.

During the positive statements condition, the teacher continued completing the Report Cards each day.

Accuracy of Parents' Implementation of the Program

Because of the difficulties involved in placing trained observers in the homes to monitor the implementation of the program, the researcher maintained occasional telephone contact with the parents asking for self reports of the use of prompting and positive statements (Ayllon, Garber, and Pisor, 1975).
RESULTS

The percentage of homework assignments completed by each of the four subjects is shown in Fig. 1 as a function of the assignments.

During the baseline condition all of the four subjects had 0% of assignments done. After the sixth day of baseline, two of the students were introduced to the second condition. When Homework Checklists were sent home daily, S1 continued with 0% of homework completion during the six days of this condition. S2, however, completed 100% of his assignments in all but one of the six days (83%). For S3, the second condition started after the seventh day of baseline and he completed 100% of his assignments 50% of the time. S4, who also started the second experimental situation after the seventh day, averaged one out of four assignments (25%).

Condition III. The introduction of the second independent variable did not produce any effects on homework completion for S1. He showed 0% of assignments done on each of the six days of this condition. This was true for Ss 3 and 4 as well, since both showed 0% of homework done.

For S2, the implementation of the third condition continued producing the positive results observed during the Homework Checklist alone. He completed 100% of his assignments on each of the days of this condition.
Reliability

The reliability percentage for homework completion was 100% throughout the three conditions of the study.

Estimates of Quality

Since estimates are not standard measures and are viewed in this study as "supportive data," it was not possible to obtain reliability nor a systematic analysis of these results.

In general, the teacher's estimates of accuracy of homework varied from "very good" to "excellent," the two highest points in the scale.

Time Spent in Homework

Since only one of the students worked on his homework assignments during Condition III, data about time spent in homework refers only to him, and ranged from two to 10 minutes (mean 5.5).
Figure 1

Percentage of homework assignments completed by each of the four subjects in the three conditions as a function of the assignments.
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to increase school-related behavior at home with minimal teacher and parent contacts with special education students. From the data obtained with this study, it is very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the homework checklists, positive statements, prompts, and selection of environment on the amount of homework completed by the students. However, the data of one of the children, S2, clearly show a shift from 0% of homework done during baseline to 100% from the second day of Condition II through the end of Condition III.

Through the initial interview with the parents, it was observed that they didn't know when the children had homework to do. Children generally reported not having any assignment for the following school day although the truth was that they did. Thus, the rationale for using Homework Checklists was to establish a teacher-parent communication about the homework assignments for each student.

The role of homework as a link between home and school is a vital one. Homework assignments can serve as a means of providing a bond of common effort between parent, teacher, and child.

It is, therefore, essential that teachers make every effort to ensure that assignments are necessary and useful,
appropriate to the ability of the student, well explained and motivated and clearly understood by both child and parent (La Conte, 1981).

One interesting point that has to be mentioned here is that when homework was done, it was not only 100% complete but also 75 to 100% accurate. These findings do not support those of Keith (1982) where students did not generally complete their assignments.

Besides, according to the results of Goldstein (1960) and of two experiments by Harris and Sherman (1974) homework assignments may enhance classroom performance only when the homework assignments have been completed at a reasonable accuracy level. Thus, the generalization of those results to a low performing population is left to further investigations.

When using Homework Checklists, several times the students "lost" or "forgot" them at school so parents could not tell whether their child had assignments or not. An attempt at a solution was to ask the students to bring the cards signed by their parents/tutors next day, but the results were the same. This finding supports in some way the rationale of the studies by Ayllon, Garber, and Pisor (1975), Hawkins, Sluyter, and Smith (1972, Exp. 4), and Heaton, Safer, Allen, Spinnate, and Prumo (1976) who sent notes home about the child's behavior only when the report was good, attempting to increase the likelihood of the notes reaching home. On the contrary, if the student is asked to carry a note which involves homework, it may not reach...
home. A way to solve this problem could be by mailing the list of the assignments for the following week or to require the parents to call the teacher if the card failed to reach home (Kroth, Whelan, and Stables, 1970.)

At least with one of the students Homework Checklists had the expected effect on completing the assignments. In order to maintain this behavior for longer periods, it might be necessary that a home-based reinforcement program be established. According to Atkenson and Forehand (1979) home-based reinforcement programs provide an effective treatment approach to modify both disruptive and academic behavior in the classroom. The preference for this type of program is that the variety of reinforcers available at home is wider than at school (Gardner, 1976) and especially with disruptive adolescents, parental praise alone is not as effective as when paired with home privileges (Schumaker, 1977, Exp. 2.)

The difference in performance between the students in present investigation may be due to one or several reasons. First, this project started four weeks before the end of the school year. By this time, children already knew whether they were going to pass or fail the year and they also knew that one more assignment done or not done was not going to change the decision already taken. Besides, with the excitement of the summer vacation it was very difficult to keep their motivation in academic matters.
Second, starting almost at the end of the school year also implied that the behavior patterns were already established in the children. The short period in which this study was in effect was probably not enough to establish any stable change in their performance. This is probable in the case of S3 who completed 50% of his assignments in Condition II before returning to a baseline level.

Third, the teacher did not have any kind of contingencies established for completion of homework assignments. Each Monday the students, supervised by the teacher, determined their assignments for the new week even though some of them were two or more weeks behind without having any special contingency for that.

Fourth, the differences in the environment were, according to the author, the most important reason for the observed differences in performance. The physical environment for the three subjects who did not show changes in homework completion was similar. Any place at home fulfilled all the requirements for skillful home study listed in the Parents' Handout (see Appendix D.) Besides, although the parents/tutors of these children agreed to participate in this project, their motivation was very low. This could be observed by their interest in sending back the Parents' Daily Report Cards. The experimenter received only 14% of the cards from each of these three students,
while the parents of S2 sent back 100% of them. When parents were contacted about this problem, they mentioned having "forgotten" them or "having had other things to do at home." At the end of the study the tutor of S1 stated that she was still unable to control his behavior and that she would give him up for foster care again.

Fifth, the parent-child relationship seemed to play an important role also in the difference in performance between S2 on the one hand and Ss1, 3, and 4 on the other. For these three students, there was obvious lack of supervision, parental support and motivation.

Moreover, since the use of positive statements and reminders was determined only by self reports there is a possibility that an accurate implementation of the program was lacking.

Considering the five points mentioned above, it is possible to conclude that the changes observed in homework completion for S2 were functionally related to the variables introduced by the experimenter.

Several techniques were used to modify school-related behavior at home but no attempt was made to make component analyses of homework checklists, prompts, selection of environment, or the use of positive statements to determine what particular part(s) was(were) responsible for the changes observed. In fact, it is not possible to evaluate
the effects of Homework Checklists on one hand and the "package" of variables used in Condition III on the other, since homework completion for S2 was already at a 100% level when these variables were introduced.

Further research is needed to make such analysis as well as add to the generality of the present findings. It would be necessary also to begin any future investigation early in the school year to avoid the problems encountered by the author, and to work for longer periods of time. This may increase the likelihood of changing patterns of behavior already established in the repertoires of the children.
HOMEWORK CHECKLIST

ASSIGNMENT:

READING: __________________________ Pages _____ to _____

BOOK

QUESTIONS NUMBER _____ to _____ PAGE(S) ______.

MATH: __________________________ Pages _____ to _____

BOOK

SOLVE PROBLEMS _____ PAGE(S) ______.

WRITE PAPER ABOUT __________________________ Pages Long _____

OTHER __________________________

DATE __________________________

____________________ TEACHER
INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARENTS

Attached is a Daily Report card to be filled out by you everyday.

I. Write down the times when your child starts and finishes homework.

II. As soon as your child is done, check his homework using the Homework Checklist. Fill out the report card marking the amount of work done in the space provided.

III. Finally, cross out "yes" or "no" to indicate whether or not you reminded your child to do his homework.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Carmen Barocio
Western Michigan University
PARENTS' DAILY REPORT CARD

CHILD'S NAME_________________________ DATE____________________

I. TIME STARTED______________________ TIME FINISHED__________

II. HOMEWORK WAS:

NOT DONE  HALF DONE  COMPLETED DONE

III. I REMINDED MY CHILD TO DO HIS/HER HOMEWORK:       YES      NO

IV. COMMENTS:________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

PARENT
INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Enclosed you will find the Teacher's Daily Report Card of your student _____________________.

I. Consider ALL the homework assigned for today as 100% and make an estimate of the amount completed by this student. Then, cross out the cell that best describes the amount of homework done.

II. Estimate the overall quality of today's homework by checking one out of the five describers.

III. Sign the report card.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Carmen Barocio
Western Michigan University
TEACHER'S DAILY REPORT CARD

DATE ______________________

STUDENT'S NAME _______________________________________________________

I. PERCENTAGE OF HOMEWORK DONE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT DONE</th>
<th>5-25%</th>
<th>25-50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50-75%</td>
<td>75-95%</td>
<td>COMPLETE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. THE QUALITY OF HOMEWORK WAS:

____ POOR    ____ FAIR    ____ GOOD    ____ VERY GOOD    ____ EXCELLENT

________________________
TEACHER
PARENTS' GUIDE FOR HOMEWORK

SOME SKILLFUL GUIDELINES FOR HOME STUDY:

1. Schedule a definite time for studying - a good time could be after supper when other activities have been done.

2. Find a definite place to study - this place has to be large enough for materials, well lighted, and reasonably free of outside disturbances. It's also important that parents can supervise their children while doing their assignments.

3. Keep at hand all the materials your child may need before he/she starts: books, eraser, paper, dictionary, ruler, colors, etc.

GENERAL REMINDERS TO DO HOMEWORK:

1. State clearly in words the child is likely to understand what you want him to do.

2. Make the statement in a normal tone of voice (calm, moderate).

3. Do not say anything about rewards or punishment.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

"Turn the TV off and do your homework."

"Start your assignments now."

"As soon as dinner is finished, start doing your homework."

"Remember that it is homework time now, it's 6 o'clock."
EXAMPLES OF WHAT NOT TO SAY:

"If you don't do your homework, you'll go to bed without dinner."

"Do you think you can act as an adult today and do your homework?"

"If you don't study, you won't go to the movies tomorrow."

"If you do what I say, I'll give you ice cream for dessert."
THINGS TO DO WHILE HOMEWORK IS BEING DONE OR AFTER IT IS FINISHED:

1. Pay attention to your child by doing such things as touching, hugging, patting, kissing, hair messing (in fun), etc., include positive gesturing directed to the child, such as waving, clapping, etc.

2. Say positive things about studying, such as "good boy," "beautiful," "fantastic," "good," "OK."

3. Describe a specific thing that the child is doing such as how, what, where, or when of the activity.

4. Say things that the child is likely to understand.

5. Voice quality should be pleasant, happy, calm.

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE STATEMENTS:

"I really liked that you remembered to do your homework before I had to tell you."

"That was really a big job for you to do by yourself. You looked up the long words you found in the story. I'm very proud that you learned to use the dictionary."

"It makes me very happy to see you doing your homework."

"I like to see you doing your math problems."

Talking to the child about his day at school, smiling, asking questions to show interest.

GENERAL PRAISING WORDS AND PHRASES:

Good! That shows a great deal of work.
That's right! You really pay attention.
Excellent! You should show this to your (mom, dad, etc.)
That's clever! I like that!
Exactly! I'm pleased with your work.
EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

1. The child says he has finished doing his homework. The parent says, "It's about time you did it, it's the first time in years that you have done it by yourself."

2. The child tells his parent that he has a question about one of the math problems. The parent says, "If you put more attention to the teacher, you would understand everything. But, you're always talking to the others."
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