
TUTORING: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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Research has shown that successful students have parents who are involved in school programs and who carefully monitor their child's progress. Children who read well in the early grades are more successful in later years, and those who fall behind rarely catch up with their peers. Parents want to support and help their child to maximize academic performance. At times, this may mean considering a tutor.

Parents may consider using a tutor for a child who is struggling academically and in need of remediation, to prevent academic problems, to supplement instruction at school, or to prepare for school/college entrance exams. However, tutoring is only one of many options that may be available for getting help for a child who is having difficulty.

The purpose of this handout is to provide parents with information regarding how to tell whether their child may need tutoring, the typical range of tutoring options (including benefits and limitations of each), what criteria should be used in selecting a tutor, and what to expect from the experience.

Signs That My Child May Need a Tutor

Discuss concerns with the teacher. The first step is to obtain information from your child's teacher. Set up a conference to discuss skill areas that may require remediation or improvement. Teachers will pinpoint your child's academic strengths and weaknesses, and may recommend procedures and/or materials that may be helpful. Try to understand whether your child needs more skill *practice* or more specialized *instruction* to grasp the subject matter. This distinction may be helpful when weighing available options regarding the best services for your child.

Questions to guide your decision. Consider the following questions to determine whether tutoring may be a reasonable option:

- Is doing homework a constant battle?
- Is your child consistently earning low grades and receiving negative progress reports?
- Is your child reading below grade level? Does your child read with fluency (the capacity to read text accurately and quickly) and with comprehension?
- Is your child able to communicate effectively?
- Is your child experiencing difficulty with subject concepts?
- Is your child able to plan and organize academic material?

Criteria for Selecting a Tutor

Qualifications. The most important consideration when seeking a tutor is the tutor's competence. In general, select someone with certification and training in the area of your child's weakness. Choose someone or a center or a group that has demonstrated success in working with children with similar weaknesses and learning needs as your child. Check credentials and references closely to ensure that you are hiring someone credible and knowledgeable.

Costs. Typically there is a wide range of tutoring options available within most communities. The price is usually based on level of certification (certified teacher, teacher specialist, college student) and area of expertise. Expect to pay more for a tutor who is qualified to provide instruction in areas such as higher level math and science (calculus and physics may be the most expensive).

Convenience. Discuss with the tutor location, time, frequency, and length of each session. As a parent juggling many other responsibilities, being able to schedule sessions that can be easily coordinated with the family's schedule may be critical.

Options. The table provided at the end of this handout lists widely available tutoring options, along with training of tutors, convenience, benefits, and limitations.

What to Expect From a Tutor

What follows is a list of reasonable expectations. The degree to which these expectations hold true may vary depending on the tutoring option.

- Knowledge of and experience with individualized approaches of instruction
- Coordination between the tutoring and the classroom program
- Realistic and appropriate goals and estimated timelines for reaching those goals
- A regular report of child progress and outcome data if available (pre-testing and post-testing of skills)
- A professional handling of all aspects
- Demonstrated gains in skills and abilities targeted by tutoring

Summary

If you feel your child is struggling academically or in need of improvement, seek help. One-to-one instruction, using well-designed intervention provided as a supplement to regular classroom instruction, is considered to be an effective means of increasing student achievement. Research has shown that tutoring interventions help children overcome academic hurdles and develop organizational strategies, social skills, and confidence. This, in turn, promotes positive self-esteem and gives the child the necessary tools for successful school achievement.

Resources

- Favaro, P. (1995). *Smart parenting: An easy approach to raising happy, well-adjusted kids*. New York: McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Books. ISBN: 0809234319.
- Greene, L. J. (1998). *Finding help when your child is struggling in school*. New York: Golden Books Adult Publishing. ISBN: 0307440753.

Websites

- Boys and Girls Club of America—
www.bgca.org/programs/education.asp
- National Reading Panel Report—
www.nationalreadingpanel.org
- U.S. Department of Education No Child Left Behind—
www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov
- Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)—
www.ymca.net/index.jsp

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Options for Selecting a Tutor

	Certification	Benefits	Limitations
Private tutor certified in education	Teacher certification in specific subject area in which child needs remediation	One-to-one instruction is considered to be the most effective	Scheduling; transportation; may require asking for additional textbooks from school
Tutoring by neighbor or friend	None	Good for students needing over-learning and rote practice for skill reinforcement	May lack experience in teaching higher level skills
Tutoring center	Most hire only certified teachers	Initial assessment given to determine deficit areas; instruction customized	Small group instruction, usually 3 to 1; fees may be outside the range of some families
Community or faith based	Usually volunteers; seek program that offers training to staff	Highly motivated, trained, and supervised volunteers are preferred; often government funded with no cost to participants	Larger group instruction; students may have to meet specific eligibility requirements; untrained volunteers may be detrimental
School based	Certified teacher	Teachers have experience in remediation and extensive knowledge of the subject area	Eligibility requirements may limit number of participants
Online program	Contact website for references; check with Better Business Bureau Online before signing on	More research is needed to determine efficacy	Inappropriate for students with limited reading, comprehension, and keyboarding skills