

## **LN Parenting: When to Call a Tutor**

*By Russel Hyken*

My son struggled with his math homework the other night: The cost of two televisions and three DVD players is \$1,421. The cost of one DVD player is half the cost of one television. What is the cost of one television? After 15 minutes of deliberation and a trial-and-error algebraic approach, I solved the problem. The next day, my fourth grade child came home with a much simpler solution using 'the new math.'

Difficult numerical problems are just one of the many academic challenges my son has faced this year. Multifaceted scientific projects, classroom presentations, and a lot of required reading are part of his curriculum. Academics are much more complex and sophisticated than they were in my grade school era. Computers, Internet, global connections and high-stakes testing have led to increased academic expectations and innovative teaching methodologies.

Due to these demands, many families are hiring private tutors. In years past, these professionals were often only used when students struggled. Nowadays, tutors are employed to boost GPA and to prepare for admission tests. Additionally, there are professional businesses and academic camps that promise to improve your student's work habits and help your child realize their full potential. Tutoring is a \$3.5 billion, consumer-driven industry. When, however, is the right time to consider private pay services?

The most compelling reason to employ academic assistance is for a struggling student. Children as young as 4 or 5 years old can benefit from remedial support. Older students may need help with a specific subject or have difficulty understanding a particular teacher. In all situations, there are signs that say now is the time to find a professional. Consider if your child is working to capacity to understand his schoolwork. Many students put forth an appropriate amount of effort but still experience low grades. Review homework and determine if it is sloppy, incomplete, and/or just wrong. Also, check on your child's emotional state. If he is experiencing test anxiety or has a big drop in classroom confidence, academic confusion could be the cause. A tutor may be the solution, but before spending money, talk to the school.

As students learn new concepts, many may experience some sort of learning crisis. Consulting with the teacher can alleviate parental concerns, letting you know if others share the same frustration or if your child is doing better than he realizes. Teachers also are an excellent resource for after-school assistance or a referral to a school-based program. Your child may need a tutor, or he may only need a little extra attention and support.

Some children struggle because they have a unique learning challenge. Undiagnosed ADHD or another specific disability may be causing the academic difficulties. Consult with your pediatrician and engage in a formal psycho-educational evaluation to learn what strategies may be useful. An accurate diagnosis that identifies specific deficits is the key to understanding these situations. Then, find a specially trained tutor who can systematically increase your child's academic recovery and build school confidence. Another common reason for educational assistance is test preparation for high school and college entrance exams. While this type of help sounds like a good idea, it could overburden a student who has a demanding workload, creating unneeded stress. Other kids, however, may welcome the opportunity to build skills through test prep classes. Have a discussion with your student to determine if he is open to this opportunity, and check with your school to see what programs they recommend.

Tutors are not babysitters, homework-doers or substitute parents; rather, a tutor is one who motivates, asks probing questions and fosters independent thinking. And lastly, a tutor, especially a good one, takes the pressure off parents, such as myself, to prove that they are, in fact, 'smarter than a fifth grader.'

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