

Visit With the Utays

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School Psychology and Education Specialists

Dr. Joe Utay, Director of Counseling and Evaluation Services for Total Learning Centers and former professor for Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Department of Counseling, is a graduate of University of Pittsburgh, a school psychologist, marriage and family therapist, author, national speaker, and father.

Dr. Carol Utay is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers. She is also a graduate of University of Pittsburgh and an expert in learning and special education. "Dr. Carol" has experience as a principal, Orton-Gillingham reading therapist, teacher, consultant, national speaker, professor, author, and mother. She is a recognized national Athena Award winner for community service.



The "If" Approach to Picking a Method to Improve Attention

"Dear Drs. Utay: My child desperately needs to strengthen his ability to stay focused. We're not exactly against using medication but want to know options. A Google search was overwhelming – thousands of approaches advising what to do – from vitamins to special music. You are known for your success helping all sorts of kids, what do you suggest?"

You may be surprised to learn that vitamins and music CAN help kids improve their attention. Even the most far-fetched ideas make sense if you simply add the word "if" before the approach. IF a child lacks basic nutritional health, vitamins can help that child's attention stay actively engaged. IF a child's middle or inner ear isn't adequately helping to process sounds, psychoacoustic research suggests certain music can help develop better attention. See how the "if" method works? It makes a lot more sense than either grasping totally onto one approach or getting overwhelmed with the many advertised approaches.

The reason we have been so successful, as you so kindly put it, "helping all sorts of kids," is that we individualize to find the best solutions for each child's specific strengths and needs.

Research shows clear paths that can lead to improvement in all five types of attention. Medication, for example, remains one of the most common attention-improving tools. However, many families do not want to, are not able to, or like you, do not like being limited to only medication.

After evaluating a child's attention, as professionals, we ask ourselves these questions to determine which approaches to recommend: 1) What does current research support? 2) What does our 30 years of training and experience suggest? and 3) Simply put, what works? **The evaluation allows us to specify your child's particular "if" in the equation.**

Most pediatricians agree that students with attention issues almost always need more than a one-prong approach (such as medication). **Research, training, and experience inform us to use these three categories of ways of supporting students: 1) counseling and consultation (including mindfulness, and modifying parental and other environmental influences), 2) step-by-step direct instruction in "how to attend better" actually improving the brain's ability to attend, often in coordination with 3) medical/nutritional consultation and referrals.**

It is exciting to see improvements instead of just accepting accommodations. Accommodations may also be necessary (moving where they sit in class, allowing a quiet work or test environment, etc.), but **we want intrinsic skills to be improved too.** As you discovered, there are ALWAYS options. Good ones. **The key is focus on the process of matching the options to your child's specific needs.** IF you do, you will provide one more way to help prepare today for success tomorrow.

For useful information about your child's specific strengths and **needs** as well as **practical recommendations**, call Total Learning Centers at (724) 940-1090. If easier, email us at success@TotalLearningCenter.com. Visit us at www.TotalLearningCenter.com and follow Dr. Carol Utay on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/carolutay>.

Total Learning Centers was voted AGAIN Best Tutoring and Best SAT Prep by Nickelodeon's Parent Picks.

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