

# Visit With The Utays Four Homework Tips:

## How to Tip Your Children's Scale in the Direction of Learning, October 2001



**D**r. Joe Utay, a graduate of Pitt, has been a counselor, psychologist, family therapist, author, national speaker, teacher, clinic director and father. He earned tenure as a professor training school counselors, marriage and family therapists, and school psychologists; and is now Director of Counseling and Evaluation Services for Total Learning Centers. Dr. Carol Utay, also a graduate of Pitt, has experience as a Principal, teacher, computer trainer, national speaker, adjunct professor, author, and mother. With a doctorate in education, she has trained thousands of teachers and parents to help children achieve success and feel good about themselves. She is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers. Joe and Carol live and work in Wexford with their daughter Andrea.

---

*Homework once again has become a battle. My oldest is not very organized or motivated to do homework. My middle one forgets homework or does not understand what to do. My youngest still hasn't memorized math facts. Help!*

After dealing personally with homework issues with our own and 10 foster children, we found just like any other times when you're overwhelmed with a big challenge, dividing it into several smaller easier-to-handle pieces makes it, if not easier to solve, at least less stressful. By the way, the technical psychological term we use to describe a child who doesn't consistently want to do homework is "normal." Interestingly, the same term is used to describe the frustration parents feel because of such normal resistance to what children often view as a waste of time. With this in mind, onward to tips you can try.

First, homework should be at a special consistent time and place set aside to focus on just homework. No telephone, TV, music, or anything else that may subtly or not-so-subtly tip the attention scale away from homework. You may discover a pet, view to the great outdoors, or some other inadvertent scale tipper! There is room for negotiation though. For example, some studies show that for some children some types of music actually helps bring their attention back when it wanders.

**Second**, whether or not they have a project due tomorrow or "no homework," they still must work during this special time. This is the time for rereading assignments, looking over notes, and completing the next small step of a long-term assignment. If not enough to do to fill the time, negotiate a book or magazine they can read.

**Third**, talk with your children and their teachers to find out why doing homework is so difficult. Your oldest child may be bored, your middle one may have a memory or language problem, and your youngest may

need to fill in "holes" in math skills. If the work is boring, either modify it or help them accept that they still must do the work anyway. If the level of difficulty is the challenge, find out why. If the teacher cannot give you clear and understandable answers, ask for some basic testing.

Schools offer testing but in most cases schools typically don't have services available except for students not progressing in the curriculum (with some notable exceptions such as for the "gifted"). Schools usually don't count frustration or not doing homework as sole reasons for offering special help. So, if grades are above failing but you suspect a problem, have the testing done privately or at a licensed learning center.

**Fourth**, if the tug of wills during homework time involves "normal stress" then tell yourself about this aspect of parenting what you tell your children about homework: "It's just something you have to do." If though it is truly negatively affecting your parent/child relationship, it's time to get you out of the mix. Investigate using a neighbor, high school student, your spouse or other relative, or a learning center that offers homework support.

You are so right to make certain this year is better than last. By choosing to take a proactive stance in seeking better options, you tip the balance in favor of helping your children prepare today for success tomorrow.

*For more information and great websites to help with homework challenges, visit the Total Learning Center website:*

*<http://www.TotalLearningCenter.com> or call (724) 940-1090 for the Homework Help Packet (no charge, as always).*

---