

Visit With The Utays

March 2004

School Psychology and Education Specialists

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Dr. Joe Utay, graduate of University of Pittsburgh, is a school psychologist, marriage and family therapist, author, national speaker, teacher, clinic director, and father. He earned tenure as a professor training counselors and school psychologists and is now Director of Counseling and Evaluation Services for TLC and part-time professor for Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Carol Utay, graduate of University of Pittsburgh, is an expert in curriculum, learning, special education, and technology. She has experience as a principal, teacher, consultant, national speaker, professor, author, and mother. "Dr. Carol" is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers. The Drs. Utay live and work in Wexford with their daughter Andrea.

Help Your Child Succeed in School

Use the total learning approach to preparing today for success tomorrow.

This month's questions from parents varied so widely that we discovered our answers intertwined like a complex interstate intersection of highways going over, then under, and then merging into one another. An answer to a question related to social *skills* included addressing social *feelings*. Answers to questions about *academic* problems included addressing *parenting* issues. Answers to questions about *emotional stress* included addressing possible *physical causes* (like sleep deprivation), *physical results* (like higher incidences of stomach aches or headaches), and *physical solutions* (like biofeedback). *Behavior problems* at school can relate to *family issues* at home. So, it is naïve to assume that it is sufficient to solve, for example, severe math anxiety by *just* getting extra help with math.

We can have interesting discussions about each area – skills, feelings, academics, etc. But, in real ongoing moment-to-moment living, the boundaries between these concepts are very fluid. A more accurate analogy for this than intersecting roads is intersecting rivers. Though there has been debate for eons on which comes first and the relative importance of each part, the consensus among professionals seems to be that they are all important. For example, some people say your thoughts lead to certain feelings and then you base your specific behavior on those feelings that stem from those thoughts. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy is entirely based on this concept. Equally intelligent and respected professionals have argued

for a different order. Everyone agrees though that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are ALL important. The same applies to educators who agree that learning phonics AND sight words are important in learning to read.

A current trend in both counseling and education is to integrate solutions to problems by looking more at the total picture. For example, even though a math tutor can indeed help decrease math anxiety by increasing math skills which in turn increases confidence, increasing OTHER skills unrelated to math can increase general confidence and also end up decreasing math anxiety. So, we're taking a break this month from answering a specific question about a specific problem by offering specific solutions. This month we recommend looking not so much *at* the problem but all *around* it. If it relates to feelings, consider the effect of a change in thinking, and vice versa. If it relates to a skill, consider what feeling or relationship changes might help and vice versa. The suggestion, "Think outside the box," applies well here by offering more possibilities to total up in your repertoire of options. Navigating through the flowing waters of the problem and exploring previously uncharted tributaries can be a powerful way to help your children prepare today for success tomorrow.

Please ask! For more information and great websites to help with education challenges, visit the Total Learning Center website: www.TotalLearningCenter.com or call (724) 940-1090 for a free copy of a TLC CD full of useful information for parents.

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