

Visit With The Utays

August 2004

School Psychology and Education Specialists

Reprinted from Northern Connections



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 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.

Prevent Frustration: Create a Homework Plan Now

“School is beginning and I dread it as much as my kids do. The worst of it is only one aspect of the entire academic-social-emotional-physical world of education— doing homework! Much of it is ridiculous and we don’t have time for it anyway.”

You seem like a typical loving American parent who truly wants the best for your children so probably, 1) you’ve over-scheduled extracurricular activities, 2) TV and/or video games take center stage when it comes to high priority at-home activities, 3) you’re afraid to push your children too hard for fear they’ll crack under the strain, and 4) you’re afraid to be too easy on them for fear they won’t live up to their potential. If this is you, you’re not alone. Our society has many systems to allow and develop these norms. But, believe it or not, you do have a choice to be “normal” or not, and if you do, to what extent.

At Total Learning Centers we often hear about this source of family stress from new clients. It is clear that the ones most successful at achieving some sanity around balancing structure and flexibility have a plan and that plan is based on what they value as a family. It may be very structured, very flexible, or in between, but it is a plan.

Jan Faull, author of *Unplugging Power Struggles*, pushes more toward the structured side but warns that balance is necessary: “In your zealously to promote academics, be careful not to overdo it. Too much frustration leads to anxiety, which is

counterproductive to academic achievement. It's a fine line you walk. You need to know when to push, when to listen to your child's frustrations and when to back off.”

So, first decide as a family exactly what you do value, THEN make a homework plan based on those values. For example, do you value honest effort less than, as much as, or more than expected achievement? How much do you value spending time as a family discussing your successes, frustrations, hopes, and aspirations? What values are reflected in the videogames and TV shows your children watch just before or after (or during?) homework? See how your answers will, or should, affect your homework plan?

We’re not suggesting TV, videogames, extracurricular activities, or homework is wrong or bad. It’s just that too often they spring up like streets in and around Pittsburgh; suddenly it’s confusing and you wonder how to find your way. Don’t blame the streets. What you need is a good map as one more way to help 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.

Reprinted from the Northern Connections August 2004