

# Visit With the Utays

July 2008

*School Psychology and Education Specialists*

**D**r. 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.

**D**r. 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 national 2006 Athena Award winner for community service.



Drs. Joe and Carol Utay are charter members of Allegheny North Kiwanis, a global organization of volunteers dedicated to changing the world, one child, one community at a time. They are proud parents of Andrea, who graduated college after struggling successfully with support from the educational community and experts at Total Learning Centers.

## Give Your Child's Brain a Workout this Summer, Part 2

Last month, we began answering a question about executive functioning: *"I think our son, David, needs to improve his ability to plan, organize and accomplish complex school tasks, or put plainly, to use his head better! ..."*

We began by discussing how to motivate David to get help. This month we focus on what to look for when deciding if this is the area (executive functioning) to improve this summer.

So, what does it look like when there is a problem? Karen Fried and Dr. Melissa Mullin, of K & M Center in Santa Monica, offer these typical examples of **key mental processes involved in executive functioning**:

1. Inhibit: to stop one's own behavior. Example: **Cannot stop talking, moving or looking before they leap.**
2. Shift: to move from one activity or one problem to another. Example: **inflexibility requiring consistent routines, upset when confronting changes and transitions, and constantly asking what is going to happen next.**
3. Initiate: to begin either a task, to generate ideas, or problem solve. Example: **problems starting homework or chores and need extensive prompts to begin.** (As with each of these, the idea is to look for consistent problems, not just typical avoidance.)
4. Use working memory: to remember for immediate use such as phone numbers or directions. Example: **forgetting what they were supposed to get when sent on an errand, not remembering rules, and struggling with mental manipulation of numbers or words.**
5. Plan: to manage current or future tasks by setting goals and developing steps. Example: **trouble dividing**

**large assignments into manageable pieces, not having the right materials when needed, and under estimating time needed to finish a task.**

6. Organize materials: work, play, and storage spaces. Examples: **losing belongings or assignments and keeping a room messy.**
7. Monitor: to check one's own work. Example: **rushing, making mistakes, failing to check ongoing work, all with no mid-course corrections.**

Though not all children with executive functioning problems have difficulties in each of the above areas, it does not take much of a deficit in any one area to cause long lasting - and often devastating - **frustration leading to a sense of, "What's the use in trying?"**

Next month we will focus on successful approaches to develop executive functioning. **If you can't wait**, as always, just call the Total Learning Center nearest you in Wexford, Fox Chapel, Murrysville, or South Hills for answers to specific questions about your particular child's needs as well as expert brain-based programs available this summer and throughout the year (877- SKILL 11). If easier, email us at [info@TotalLearningCenter.com](mailto:info@TotalLearningCenter.com). Because it affects SO many important aspects of academic, social, athletic, and even spiritual life, **developing the brain's executive functioning processes is one more way to help your child prepare today for success tomorrow.**

*Reprinted from Northern Connections July 2008.*