

Visit With the Utays

May 2009

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 national Athena Award winner for community service.

End School Frustration: Parent to Parent

Stressed figuring out why your child is not doing well in school? When a student has problems with reading, math, writing, or other classes, often parents first try to increase study time or motivation or provide brief focused tutoring on a specific topic. But what if those are not enough? This month we asked a mother what she did to find out what the underlying true problems were when those tactics were insufficient.

Dr. Carol Utay (Dr. U): Susan, please share with our readers how you moved from frustration to celebration with Tyler.

Susan: It was clear to us as parents that Tyler was a bright child, so we were confused when his grades started to slip, then got worse.

Dr. U: Most parents would assume the problem is motivation.

Susan: That was our first of several assumptions. We knew we were wrong about lack of motivation being the culprit when we offered valuable (in his eyes) rewards resulting in only a temporary increase in effort. Next, we insisted he increase his study time and punished him for cutting it short. That was useless. Actually, it was worse than useless, since all the yelling made our relationship even worse.

Dr. U: Is that when you decided to try tutoring?

Susan: Yes, but the problem was that tutoring only skimmed the surface of what he needed. He was better able to complete homework assignments focused on during tutoring sessions. However, he was still frustrated and quizzes confirmed he just wasn't "getting it."

Dr. U: How frustrating.

Susan: For everyone in the family, not just Tyler. When I complained to our pediatrician, she recommended we take him to Total Learning Centers to find out what the REAL problem was. She explained that maybe the underlying difficulty preventing him from learning adequately was

related to attention or memory or some other aspect of learning.

Dr. U: What did Total Learning Centers discover?

Susan: Three things: 1) testing confirmed that he was intelligent; 2) his underlying problems were weak attention and slower-thinking speed; and 3) there are afterschool programs to work on each problem.

Dr. U: How did you feel about the news?

Susan: An odd mix of feeling overwhelmed by all the new information about Tyler as well as a sense of hopefulness.

Dr. U: So Susan, what final advice do you offer other parents whose initial attempts at fixing their children's school problems are unsuccessful?

Susan: Don't give up hope! Learn from those of us who have wasted time guessing at the real problem. Get your child evaluated -- which does not have to be terribly expensive or involved -- and find out for sure what the real problem is. And finally, the good news is there is an available program developed specifically to help with just about any underlying problem uncovered.

To discuss your child's individual unique needs, please contact Total Learning Centers at (724) 940-1090, email success@totallearningcenters.com, or check the website at www.TotalLearningCenters.com.

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

Reprinted from Northern Connections May 2009.