

Visit With the Utays

December 2010

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 recognized national Athena Award winner for community service.



3 Steps to Helping Kids Frustrated with Math

“Dear Drs. Utay, Our 9th grader is smart but suddenly can’t get math concepts they’re teaching her. We’re considering tutoring, but in the meantime what can we do at home to help?”

A bright student who “suddenly can’t get math concepts” is often one who can no longer make up for gaps in math basics. Students like your daughter often have a long history of figuring out workarounds like relying on their fingers, calculator, sibling, or parent to get through brief specific parts of homework that constitute gaps in their understanding. That only works for so many years, even for bright kids. **Math builds on itself. If lower concepts, such as numeration for example, are not mastered, then the concepts that come later are built on a weak foundation which eventually crumbles.**

What to do? 1) Find out the exact gaps, 2) find out the **reason** for the gaps, and 3) fill them in. **How do you figure out the specific gaps?** That’s easy now-a-days. We use nationally normed standardized tests since they pinpoint exactly which areas of math are strengths and which need work. **How do you uncover the cause of the gaps?** For professionals experienced with brain-based learning, this too is not difficult, and is unfortunately too often a skipped step. Finding out how the gaps got there in the first place make it possible to most efficiently move to the final step, filling them in. For example, if the real cause of your daughter’s gaps is math **anxiety**, then improving math **skills** may be a waste of time. If the real cause is lack of **attention to detail**, then working on **sequencing** is misused energy. If the real cause is a **working memory** weakness, then by all means, spend five weeks using Cogmed, a research-based working memory improvement program, not on traditional math tutoring. Is the real problem difficulty **reading** the math

word problems? Well, you get the idea. **Not all math problems have their roots in math.**

Then again, maybe the real underlying problem IS math. The following are just a taste of the countless activities you can do at home to help her develop math concepts and skills. (See many more at-home strategies at www.TotalLearningCenters.com.)

- Apply all math concepts to her life including special interests. For example, have her calculate the size of her room in square feet.
- Understanding patterns is vital to understanding math. Together, discover patterns in nature in the yard, art on her wall, the beat or lyrics of music she likes, habits of family members, etc.

If she still has math problems, then get help to find out why, then address **that** head on. Remediation of the underlying cause (professional jargon for filling in gaps) removes the need for ongoing tutoring and helps with other subject areas at the same time.

For more information on helping your child prepare today for success tomorrow, call Total Learning Centers at (724) 940-1090. If easier, email us at success@TotalLearningCenter.com. Visit us at www.TotalLearningCenter.com and follow Dr. Carol Utay on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/carolutay>.

Honored by Parent Advocates for Learning Support for **“outstanding dedication, passion, and commitment in meeting the learning needs of all children.”**

Total Learning Centers was voted two years running for Best Tutoring and Best SAT Prep by Nickelodeon’s Parent Picks.

Reprinted from Northern Connections December 2010.