

Visit With the Utays

March 2011

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.



How to Handle First Final Fears

Dear Drs. Utay,

My child is taking final exams for the first time and she is extremely nervous. Ever since she found out it will be a cumulative test she hasn't been able to focus on anything else. She wants to do well but is overwhelmed and disorganized. How can I help?

Finals can be overwhelming for any student, especially the first time. Add that it covers all previously covered material (cumulative) and that your daughter is disorganized and you have a recipe for high stress. Even middle school students used to taking finals, which typically only cover material presented since the previous quiz or test, are overwhelmed with cumulative finals when in high school. Wanting to do well is great, but with extra-curricular activities, multiple varied high pressure classes, and a myriad of social, family, physical, and technology-based distractions, today's students must have the right tools to perform to the best of their abilities on final exams. Motivation is necessary but not sufficient for success, especially on cumulative finals.

Being disorganized leads to a sense of being overwhelmed which in turn hampers the energy it takes to become organized, resulting in a sense of being utterly stuck. No doubt your daughter simultaneously feels she must prepare and yet cannot prepare - another recipe for high stress. So, is there a recipe for success? Always! The most important aspect of studying for final exams is management of time and materials. Successful students actively participate in discussions, take notes, and save all tests and worksheets. Every evening they review (at least briefly) all the information presented in every single class. Habits like these both maximize long term memory retention and inspire much needed confidence when finals roll around.

While parents and students alike recognize these as useful methods, many students will still feel overwhelmed. They say, "Yeah yeah I know, but I just can't do it." At Total Learning Centers, we try to put things in perspective for students and teach them how to handle information overload. We focus on multiple methods of moving information most efficiently from short term to working to long term memory for easy access

during the final. Students need specific instruction then applied guidance on HOW to create and review relevant flash cards, HOW to create a personalized study guide, HOW to review chapters and notes, etc. The key for you as a parent is not to approach this issue with the same overwhelmed attitude and disorganized methods as your child is approaching her finals! Modeling calm hopeful confidence while directly teaching specific skills for studying for high stress activities such as finals is one more way to help your child prepare today for success tomorrow.

If your child needs extra support and individualized strategies for preparing for finals, we invite you to contact Total Learning Centers. We can help with any issues concerning tests, including cumulative final exams. Give us a call (724) 940-1090 or check out the website, www.totallearningcenter.com – we would love to talk to you more. If easier, email us at success@TotalLearningCenter.com. 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 March 2011.