

Visit With the Utays

June 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.



What do Attention, Thinking, Planning, Memory and Follow-through have in Common?

Dear Drs. Utay

After testing with a school psychologist, we were told our son has a problem with executive functioning. He is intelligent but can't apply himself. I thought he just needed more motivation or better study skills but it's more complicated than that. What is executive functioning and how do I work with my son to improve it?

Executive functioning affects every aspect of life in and out of school. Many children just like your son struggle with executive functioning deficiencies, but few are given the tools to make improvements. Let's start with the basics.

The professional definition of executive functioning is: *A set of processes involving managing oneself and one's resources in order to achieve a goal. It is an umbrella term for the neurologically-based skills using mental control and self-regulation.* In plain English, we're talking about how well and fast someone pays attention, thinks, makes plans, then remembers and actually completes a plan. That entire process could take a matter of seconds when eating a bite of food or weeks when completing a big school project or preparing for and taking a test. The problem comes when a link is weak or missing from this brain-based chain of events:

John started off the year great but soon his parents began to get notes from school about missing assignments and falling grades. They were shocked that their bright son was all of a sudden not doing well in school. He explained that he missed just one assignment and one test he forgot to study for and so he assured them this was a temporary problem, and in fact, not really a problem. His parents told him to try to stay more organized and remember to write everything in his assignment book. They offered him a new video game to motivate him to get his grades up.

Many parents will recognize that scenario. If John's problem was lack of motivation, then the problem is solved. If his

problem was not writing down all his assignments or a need for better organization, problem solved. Many kids like John "simply" need caring supportive parents to get involved by encouraging him and providing structure and clear expectations to achieve at the level they know he can attain. However, often students need more than motivation or better study habits. Many lack the "brain tools" to continue the same level of school success they had just a year before.

Read next month's *Visit with the Utays* to see how John turned his grades around through strengthening each link in the chain that makes up the brain's executive functioning. If you need more immediate insight into how to improve your own child's executive functioning, especially how to prepare it this summer for success this fall, call us at ... (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.

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