

How to Choose a Tutor (Or Other Education Service Provider)

By: Judy Shanley (2005)

When looking for a professional to deliver tutoring services to your child, what are some of the important questions to ask and issues to keep in mind?

The Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities (CCLD) offers the following suggestions:

Explain to your child why you think a tutor is needed and what a tutor does. Talk about what you hope will be accomplished with a tutor.

Ask your child's teacher or other parents for recommendations. Consider interviewing several tutors with your child. (If your child is a part of the process, he/she will be more open to accepting help.)

Check the tutor's credentials. Ask about training, experience, and references. It is important that the tutor is a certified teacher or has expertise in the subject being taught. Find out whether the person has experience working with students at your child's grade level. If the tutor is working with a child with a learning disability, it is essential that he/she has been trained to use appropriate techniques that can address the student's special needs.

Set clear goals for the tutoring and request a description of the tutoring plan. Whenever possible, ask your child's teacher to participate in the design of this plan so that it links to school work. Try to create a partnership between you, your child's teacher, and the tutor.

If possible, schedule tutoring for the times of the day when your child is ready to learn. After-school hours are the most common time for tutoring but this is also when students are tired or distracted by other activities. Allow for much-needed breaks from the school routine.

For students with a learning disability, consider scheduling more than one lesson a week. Students with learning disabilities often need practice and repetition to master skills. Also, remember that it takes time to see improvement, so do not expect a quick fix.

Observe your child working with the tutor. The session should include hands-on learning and be very interactive. The tutor should be guiding your child through direct teaching and guided practice.

Request periodic reports from both the tutor and your child's teacher. There should be noticeable academic improvement within a few months.

The following suggestions for selecting a tutor come from LD OnLine:

It is essential that a student with learning disabilities work with a tutor trained to use the appropriate multisensory techniques. Be sure to ask about training, experience, and references.

There must be a good rapport between the tutor and student. Give the relationship a chance to develop (about eight lessons) but if it doesn't, look for another tutor.

Plan tutoring for the time of day that the student is fresh and ready to learn. Tutoring is an intense learning experience and you want to take every advantage of it. Many younger students are at their best before school and many schools will facilitate tutoring during the school day.

Set the goals of tutoring with the tutor. Be sure you are both clear about whether you are focusing on remedial work, content subjects, or how to study. Resist the temptation to try to accomplish too much.

Schedule a minimum of two lessons a week. Students with learning disabilities need practice

and repetition to master their lessons and it takes time to see improvement.

It is better to have lessons that are more frequent over a short period than to spread the same number of lessons over a longer period because the student will make slow progress and become more discouraged.

If you do not know a skilled tutor, an organization dedicated to working with the learning disabled will be able to find a tutor with the right background and will have the resources necessary to support the tutor's work.

Arrange to talk with the tutor periodically to monitor progress, when the child is not present.

Ask the student's teacher to talk with the tutor. Teachers feel reassured to know that someone is helping a student and they are working toward common goals.

Tell your child why she/he is getting tutoring and what you hope to accomplish so that she/he will feel hopeful rather than stupid.

When does a child need a tutor?

There are many different reasons why children receive tutoring. According to CCLD, hundreds of thousands of children having difficulty with a subject in school are currently being tutored in the United States. The following are among the reasons:

Many students didn't master basic skills which need to be re-taught to them.

Some have a learning disability which poses challenges to the mastery of information and slows down progress in school.

Others have weak organizational skills which result in difficulty with keeping on schedule with studying and completing assignments.

Some students have medical, social, emotional, behavioral, and/or family problems.

Some students still others simply desire to get ahead.

Whatever the reason, tutors can both reinforce subjects that are taught in school and teach students how to work independently. Students often become more self-confident after working with a tutor.

What about Supplemental Educational Services?

Tutoring and afterschool programs may be considered "supplemental educational services" under the No Child Left Behind act. Students from low-income families who are in Title I schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services for free.

The resources listed below offer suggestions for selecting a tutor or other supplementary education service provider. Educators and parents should consider these guidelines, your own circumstances, and the suggestions of others who've already gone through the process of selecting a tutoring service. Learning from others, and sharing one's own experiences, can be the most valuable source of information of all.

Choosing a Tutor for Your Child (45K PDF)*, (Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities)

What Parents Should Know About Title I Supplemental Educational Services (45K MS Word)^, (Afterschool Alliance)

Extra Help for Student Success (130K PDF)*, (U.S. Department of Education)

Does Your Child Need a Tutor? (CBS News)

* To view this file, you'll need a copy of Acrobat Reader. Most computers already have it installed, or you can **download it** now.

^ To view this file, you'll need a copy of Microsoft Word.

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