



TutorTalk—A Parents’ Guide to Choosing a Tutor

Parents: let’s talk straight about your role in supporting your child’s educational progress. Sometimes our children need the extra academic support of a professional tutor. Whether the goal is to get better grades in school, prepare for college, or tackle more challenging skills, do you know the best way to identify your child’s needs, find the appropriate tutor, and monitor this service to ensure your goals are met?

This guide is written for parents who want to support their children’s academic development and alleviate the struggles and challenges students face from their peers, teachers, and, even perhaps you. There are no easy formulas for finding the right tutor or test prep service. However, there are common standards and practices you should expect to observe in the person or company you choose to hire.

The **Education Industry Association** (EIA) is a not-for-profit organization professional organization of education companies which promotes best practices and standards in the tutoring and test prep businesses. For this guide, we asked our members for their very best guidance in advising prospective. We hope that you will use this information to better understand the process and forms of tutoring available, and to help guide you in choosing a tutor who will truly make a difference in the academic life of your child.

What Type of Tutoring Does Your Child Need?

There are several reasons you may seek tutorial support help for your child. Whether it is one need or a combination, it is important to know why you are seeking tutoring in order to identify the best tutor for your child. You may choose a tutor for:

- ❖ ***Remediation***— Often when a surprising report card comes home or after a parent-teacher conference, you are faced with the realization that your child is not doing well in school, and want to help. Remedial sessions most often focus on filling gaps in specific skills in specific subjects, usually in math, reading or writing. As more basic skills are mastered, tutoring sessions can be spent teaching more grade-level skills, thereby increasing the student’s achievement and self-esteem.
- ❖ ***Maintenance***—Perhaps your student is beginning a new school or moving from elementary to middle school and suddenly finds the work to be different, more time consuming, or demanding. New routines or teacher expectations may quickly overwhelm your student. More often, the goals of these tutoring sessions are devoted to helping the student learn more effective time management skills,

understand their new academic responsibilities, complete homework, and help the student transition into an independent learner.

- ❖ *Remediation/Maintenance* (also called support tutoring)—A popular approach, this is particularly useful for older students who are working below grade level. This approach allows approximately half of the session to be devoted to remediation and deficient skill areas. The remaining half is devoted to maintenance and helping the student from getting any further behind by working on classroom assignments and textbook review.
- ❖ *Enrichment*—If it is clear that your child is functioning successfully at grade level, and he or she is comfortable with more challenges, it may appropriate to see a tutor to help accelerate skills development in certain subjects or skill area.
- ❖ *Test Prep*—The SAT/ACT's have never been more misunderstood or caused so much anxiety among high school-aged students trying to get into the college of their choice. You may choose a tutor who has a strong background in test taking strategies and who understands the most recent content of the SAT and ACT. Skills development/support is often an integral part of a test-prep course or tutoring program. Providing this type of assistance frequently alleviates test-taking anxiety and promotes confidence in tackling this important assessment.

Five Areas to Evaluate a Potential Tutor or Tutoring Company

The following areas should be considered when you are choosing a tutor. Talking with potential tutors and determining how he or she will address each should allow you to decide which will best benefit your child:

- ❖ *Qualifications*—Ideally, your tutor is a college graduate who holds a valid teaching certificate granted by a state education agency, or is someone with a college degree who has completed a tutor training program. This presumes the tutor understands educational theory, instructional strategies, and remedial approaches. A respectable training program outlines the basics of planning an effective session, how a student demonstrates comprehension, and how goals and objectives are to be designed to meet a student's needs. Graduate students with strong content knowledge can make effective tutors if they also have the skills to connect with the student. Tutors should also present evidence that they have no criminal record, especially if you have the service delivered in your home.

- ❖ Relationship building—This is critical to the success of the tutoring sessions. A tutor needs to be able to put your child at ease, encourage academic risks, be non-judgmental and observant of your child’s strengths and weaknesses. The tutor should also build a relationship with you by regularly updating you on the progress of your child.
- ❖ Achievement—Of course, this is the crux of why you are paying for tutoring in the first place. A tutor needs to be able to demonstrate growth both academically and in the student’s attitude toward learning. Pre- and post-testing on standardized tests or school grades can be useful objective measures of progress. A good rule of thumb is that after about 10 hours of one-to-one tutoring you should be able to notice a tangible benefit from tutoring.
- ❖ Communication—It is important that you, the consumer, to know how your money is being spent. A professional tutor will provide regular feedback on goals and objectives for your child, session content, progress or lack thereof, and plans for future sessions during a time which is convenient for you.
- ❖ Cost—Often a major factor in selecting a tutor is the cost. Costs vary from region to region and consider different tutoring models. One-to-one tutoring will be more expensive than small group tutoring and in-home tutoring will be more costly than traveling to a learning center.

Questions to Ask a Potential Tutor

Take the time to interview anyone you are considering hiring. Following are some recommended questions, but you should always consider the unique needs of your child and add other questions as you feel relevant:

- ❖ How many years have you been a tutor?
- ❖ What are your qualifications?
- ❖ Are you, or is your company, a member of the Education Industry Association?
- ❖ Can you provide references?
- ❖ What assessments do you conduct?
- ❖ What supplies and materials do you provide? What will my child need to provide?
- ❖ Will you provide private (one-to-one) tutoring?
- ❖ What is the cost?
- ❖ Are there additional fees?
- ❖ Will I have a contract?
- ❖ How can I get out of the contract?
- ❖ How will you know what my child’s needs are?
- ❖ Do you have a particular teaching philosophy?
- ❖ How will you communicate with me?

What Tutors Need to Know From You

Tutors need to understand your child as much as possible to start the sessions in a positive way. Be prepared to share with a potential tutor at least the following information:

- ❖ What seems to motivate your child?
- ❖ Does your child like school? What are his/her favorite subjects? Least favorite?
- ❖ How is your child's memory?
- ❖ How does your child feel about being tutored?
- ❖ Do you have work samples I can view?
- ❖ May I speak to the teacher regarding your child?
- ❖ Does the school agree with your assessment of your child?
- ❖ How does your child feel about standardized tests? Does s/he get anxious? What are his/her past standardized test scores like?
- ❖ Does your child have any specific organizational/study skill issues?

Resources for Finding a Tutor

Don't be nervous about beginning your search for a great tutor. There are many places tutors advertise and promote their services:

- ❖ First, check with other parents in your neighborhood. Chances are a good tutor is working right next door!
- ❖ Check with your child's teacher or school principal, guidance counselor or learning specialist.
- ❖ Look in the yellow pages for learning centers.
- ❖ Check flyers in the local library, pediatrician's offices, children's consignment stores, etc.
- ❖ On-line searches may result in locating tutors in your area
- ❖ Check with the local Better Business Bureau for a list of tutoring programs. In addition, the BBB maintains a list of businesses against which consumers have lodged complaints. You can check to see if a local company has been flagged with complaints.

Why Choose a Tutor Who is Affiliated with the EIA?

As the leading organization that promotes best practices and standards in the tutoring and test prep industry, EIA provides members with the framework of professionalism, excellent customer service, and an in-depth understanding of the responsibilities tutors face when entrusted with the care and teaching of children. Furthermore, the EIA wants you, the consumer, to know what EIA members have agreed to when offering tutoring services. When you select a tutor who is an EIA member, you will be choosing a tutor who has adopted the following knowledge and performance expectations.

EIA member tutors demonstrate:

- Knowledge of how a student learns
- Knowledge of tutoring outcomes
- Commitment to consumers
 - by using goals and objectives based on evaluations
 - by accurately describing services that will be provided
 - by accurately describing the need for these services
 - by using ads and promotional materials that are honest and devoid of deception
 - by maintaining a system to address concerns, complaints, and grievances
- Knowledge and commitment to ethical practices
 - by obeying all applicable laws, statues, regulations, and ordinances
 - by conducting business honestly and fairly

Tutor Selection Process at a Glance

1. Determine the need for a tutor.
2. Search for several tutors to interview.
3. Prescreen each tutor over the phone (don't forget to ask if they belong to the EIA!); schedule in-person interviews for the tutors you feel may be a good match for your needs. Ask for references of other satisfied clients you can speak with.
4. Check the tutor's references.
5. Interview, in person, each tutor. Don't forget to include your child!
6. After identifying the tutor who best meets your child's needs, discuss contract issues, payment, and other logistical issues. Don't be afraid to ask any and all questions on your mind. This is the time!
7. Agree to enter a tutoring relationship.
8. Begin the tutoring.
9. Monitor the progress. Discuss any on-going issues with the tutor, and ask for regular progress reports.
10. Watch those positive results!

The Education Industry Association created this guide for informational purposes only and neither as an indication of regulatory or licensing mandates nor as an endorsement of a specific organization. Furthermore, EIA makes no claim of results that may or may not occur as result of engaging a tutor or tutoring company. The standards and practices described in this guide are voluntary and may or may not be adopted by a tutor or educational company. To contact the EIA, call 800-252-3280 or visit www.educationindustry.org.