

Tutoring is a great way for adults to help children learn. Tutoring offers an opportunity for one-on-one interaction, focused support for children's problem areas and a welcome break from typical classroom situations. San Francisco School Volunteers is pleased to share with you our advice about how to be an effective tutor.

## **PURPOSES OF TUTORING**

- 1) To improve the educational achievement of the student.
- 2) To enhance student self-esteem and confidence in his/her ability to learn.
- 3) To introduce the student to the world outside the classroom through interaction with an experienced and concerned adult.
- 4) Creates new opportunities for reading.
- 5) Allows for immediate and constructive feedback.
- 6) Improves student motivation and performance.



Personal concern for your student is your greatest asset as a tutor. Keep in mind that what you do is as important as what you say. Work to build a relationship of mutual confidence with your student(s).

## **Tutoring Tips: Step-by-Step**

Begin by introducing yourself to the student. Take some time for you both to get to know each other.

- Questions can be asked by both you and the student to get to know each other, find common interests, and to initiate positive communication.
- Learn the student's name and its correct pronunciation immediately. If you are volunteering in a classroom, ask the teacher for a class list to facilitate your learning process.
- Make sure the student knows your name. Write it down for her/him and include your schedule. Introduce yourself again the next time.

2) Restructure the learning environment.

- Students are often easily distracted. Make sure you are in a relatively quiet area. Avoid areas that have popular attractions like a pencil sharpener or a water fountain.
- Clear the desk of other materials so the student can focus on the subject at hand; put books for other subjects out of sight.
- Some students might even benefit if you physically block out parts of the page or material they are not working with.

3) Begin tutoring at a level well within the grasp of the student to provide an atmosphere of success. Listen to and observe your students. Check with the teacher for any helpful hints about what teaching methods work best for the student and as to what level of understanding the student is at in regard to the particular subject. Work with the student at his/her level. Be prepared to adjust your tutoring to meet the needs of the student as he/she encounters simple to difficult concepts.

- Assess the student's understanding and grasp of the basic skills needed to complete the assignment. For example: If your student is having trouble with multiplication, you may need to find out if the problem is a lack of addition skills or poor number recognition. If the problem is not that basic, check if there is an understanding of basic multiplication operations.
- Some students are very quiet and it is important to be aware of their body language. Often students let you know in subtle ways what they are thinking, how they feel and whether they understand.

4) Getting started:

- Does the student have the ability to do the assignment? It is a good idea to find out what the student knows before jumping in to help. Ask the student if this type of assignment has been given in the past. It is often helpful to look at similar assignments to see how you can best help the student.
- If you do not understand the assignment or are not clear how to do it, be honest with the student. Read the assignment in the book aloud and refer back to earlier sections as needed. If there is no book, try different ways to do the assignment or ask the teacher for further explanation. Your student will learn how to work through a problem by watching and participating with you.

5) Give clear directions.

- Explain the assignment to the student slowly, giving one direction at a time. It is helpful to ask the student to restate the ideas in his/her own words to check for understanding of the material. This will confirm whether or not the student understands the directions.
- Break the task into small pieces if possible, allowing the student to focus on one thing at a time. For example, if a student is working on 25 math problems, block out all but five. If the problems are complicated, work on one step-by-step.
- Make sure the student understands what is to be done. Do the first problem or some examples together.
- Encourage the student to work independently on material that comes easily.

6) To the extent possible, be creative and imaginative in your tutoring methods, look for ways to motivate your student and involve her/him in the activity. Students will get restless if they know in advance when a session will begin and end.

- Have a flexible structure so that students know what to expect, perhaps a "getting started" activity to transition into your tutoring session.
- Break your session into several shorter segments of various activities, i.e., 10 minutes of oral reading or discussion, 5 minutes for a game or other fun activity, 10 minutes for writing, math drill, etc. The length and content of your segments

will depend on the attention span and needs of your student. Students will get less restless if they know in advance when the session will begin and end.

- Remember that students take in information through different learning channels (visual, auditory and kinesthetic), and that one or two of these may dominate in your student. Use special, colored markers and objects to facilitate learning. Sometimes putting things in different colors, using manipulative objects or even physical movement to represent concepts can be helpful. Tape recorders can help students who have trouble deciding and remembering what they want to write about.

If the student is a reluctant reader, it may be useful for you to offer to take turns reading every other sentence in the paragraph. This eases the pressure on the student and gives the student a chance to hear and see accurate reading skills. This is especially helpful for a reading comprehension assignment as it gives the student more time to absorb the material.

## **Effective Ways to Work With Students**

1. Be an active listener. Let the students know that what they say is important. Ask questions and restate their ideas in your own words to make sure that you understand.
2. Encourage students to do their own thinking. Be patient, i.e., give them plenty of time to answer. Silence can mean they are thinking of organizing what they want to say or write. Be sensitive to the student's needs. Provide suggestions, information sources, and help if your student does not know the answer.
3. If you don't know an answer or are unsure of what to do, admit it to the student(s) and work it out together. Feel free to ask the teacher for help when you need it.
4. Comment or apologize when you make a mistake. It is important that children hear apologies the way adults do, and to know that no one is perfect.
5. Encourage students. Focus on and reinforce the student's successful work with positive language. Give encouragement and praise positive behavior and work attitude.
6. Students learn at their own pace. Do not feel responsible for judging a student's abilities, progress, or behavior.
7. Respect a student's privacy. If a student or a teacher reveals personal information, regard it as confidential unless it is something dangerous to the student or someone else. If so, tell a teacher or the principal.
8. Keep your commitment. The students will expect you and look forward to your coming to their school. If you know you will be absent, tell them in advance. Do not make promises you cannot keep; students remember everything.
9. Be gracious and sympathetic with students' efforts.
10. Maintain a sense of humor. Enjoy yourself!

**Excerpt from Tutoring Matters: *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About How to Tutor* Jerome Rabow, Tiffani Chin, Nima Fahimian.**

- Treat your tutees as equals.
- Don't worry about mistakes - they provide the best opportunity for teaching and learning.
- Don't be critical of your tutees.
- Recognize your differences, a vital step to building a tutoring relationship.
- Recognize your commonalities, a vital step to building a tutoring relationship.
- Be supportive of tutees' efforts as well as their accomplishments.
- Be hopeful.
- Make learning active, fun, visual, and hands-on.
- Keep your eye on the significance of your effort in your tutees' lives.
- Do not use bribes or gifts to motivate your tutee.
- Be willing to share your experience when you think it's appropriate.
- Don't make empty promises.
- Don't forget how important you are - your tutee depends on you.
- Be on time.
- Use differences between you and your tutee to open up honest conversations.
- Forgive your errors and those of your tutee-they were unintentional.
- Be open-minded.
- Be empathetic toward your students and their experiences.
- Be observant and pay attention to what your tutees enjoy and how they learn.
- Incorporate tutee interests into your activities and assignments.
- Be creative.
- Set educated goals and strive for them.
- Ignore labels - they only show you part of a person.
- Be respectful.

# TIPS FOR TUTORS

1. Be yourself.
2. Treat the student as an adult and an equal.
3. Find out as much as you can about the student's academic abilities from the teacher.
4. Become familiar with the student's goals.
5. Become familiar with the student's strengths as well as weaknesses.
6. Sit beside, not across from the student.
7. Be on time and faithful in your attendance.
8. Accentuate the positive.
9. Avoid negatives in your vocabulary.
10. Allow the student to have success right away.
11. Vary activities.
12. Spend more time listening than talking.
13. Lead the student to discover answers rather than giving answers too quickly.
14. Avoid a patronizing tone or attitude.
15. Realize that we all have different values.
16. Don't be too quick to judge.

## DO'S AND DON'TS OF TUTORING

Tutoring can be an enjoyable experience that is beneficial to all concerned. Tips presented here summarize suggestions which other tutors have found helpful. They will be valuable only to the extent that you use and test them yourself.

### DO'S

- **Relax and be yourself.**  
You have been selected to tutor because you have the qualities that will make you a positive role model for your student. Also, remember that you are tutoring your peer. While he has a weakness in one subject area, you may have a weakness in another area. Nobody's perfect!
- **Establish rapport.**  
Learn each other's names. Be friendly and sincere in your efforts to understand your student as a person and learn what his interests are as well as what kind of academic help he needs. Create an atmosphere of mutual confidence.
- **Respect your student.**  
Be nonjudgmental, accepting his personal integrity without trying to manage or change him to suit your own value system. Try for an equal status, non-patronizing relationship.
- **Maintain confidentiality.**  
Be professional! Information gained about your student's handicaps, problems, test grades, scores, etc. is **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**.
- **Be sensitive to the individual needs of your student.**  
Consider such things as the instructor's style of teaching and the demands of the course; learn about your student's special sensitivities and learning style as well as his particular interests and talents. **Be informative without being intimidating.**

Resentment closes down communication. Help the student understand what is expected of him by the instructor, and by himself. Make him aware of the scope of the subject to be covered as well as of individual assignment requirements.

- Be Positive.  
Your student may have had little success in school and needs rewarding experiences. Give him feedback concerning abilities and attitudes of which he may not be aware.
- Encourage independence.  
Don't become a "crutch". Your student must be aware at all times that you are not there to do his work. Let him know that he must put forth an effort in order to benefit from tutoring. Insist that he do his assignments, study on his own, and do his own thinking, otherwise, you might be doing him more harm than good.
- Be flexible.  
Remember that the style and content of the material to be learned should be adjusted to the individual being tutored.
- Be patient.  
Never act annoyed or impatient with the student's progress or lack of it. Learning is the task at hand. Your annoyance may be just a replay of previous negative educational experience.
- Be attentive.  
Study your student for verbal and non-verbal clues. Listen carefully to all of the messages he is sending regarding his feelings about what he is doing, as well as his concerns with the subject matter and course requirements. If you end up doing most of the talking, something is wrong.
- Be a prober.  
Rather than feeding answers, probe or prompt your student to remain in an active role in the tutoring process. Engage him in a joint exploration of problems and concerns.
- Be a good explainer.  
What is obvious to you may not be obvious to your student. Communicate at his level, be clear in your instructions, answer questions, use examples, repeat information, use diagrams or illustrations.
- Encourage your student to focus on learning how to learn.  
Get him to concentrate on developing mental processes and study skills rather than on only getting the answers. Encourage him to reflect on learning situations and evaluate himself within them.
- Have confidence in yourself.  
But don't be afraid to ask for help and guidance if you need it. Don't hesitate to say that you don't know the answer. Tell your student that you will research the matter and get back to him during the next session. He may enjoy finding out that you are human too.
- Be honest with yourself.  
If, after a number of sessions, it becomes obvious to you that, for one reason or another, your student is not profiting from the tutoring, let the classroom teacher know. It will not be held against you; rather, it will be an indication of your integrity.
- Share your experience and knowledge.  
Confer with other tutors in your field about particular techniques that work. Seek and give advice. Sharing similar problems and challenges can be very productive.

- Always be on time.  
This adds to the effectiveness of your tutoring. If you are late, your student may begin to doubt the sincerity of your concern for tutoring and for him.
- Set the same standards of effort for your student as you would for other students.  
Do not adopt a condescending attitude in which you expect less of your student. Avoid lowering standards because you think they are unattainable for your student. Do not allow the student only to get by.
- Begin tutoring at a level well within the grasp of your student.  
This will provide an atmosphere of success. This kind of setting will build the student's confidence and will establish a good tutor-student relationship.
- Indicate wrong answers without emotion.  
Try not to show any disapproval or discouragement you may feel at wrong answers. Criticism can destroy self-confidence. This is very important.
- Make sure your student understands HOW you arrive at answers.  
If you are not sure that he does, test him by giving him a similar example.
- Break your tutoring session into several short segments of various activities.  
Your student will be less restless if he knows in advance when the session will end.
- Be creative and imaginative.  
Look for ways to motivate your student and include him in the activity. Do not hesitate to innovate principles of successful tutoring. There is no Right Way in tutoring. You will find yourself developing methods that work. Any method that works for your student is the Right Way to Tutor.
- Be sensitive to the existence of emotional or psychological problems.  
They may be affecting your student's performance. It is not your role to handle these problems. Do, however, bring them to the attention of the teacher with whom you work.
- Always end your session on a positive note.  
You might want to mention plans for your next session.
- Keep accurate records.  
Make sure of time spent tutoring and the names of those tutored.

## DON'TS

- Don't be quick to judge.  
Many of the students have been judged all of their lives according to stereotypes of character, ability, and intelligence. Avoid perpetuating this pattern.
- Don't assume the role and responsibility of an instructor.  
Your job is to help the instructor, not to replace him/her.
- Don't do your student's class assignment.  
You are there to help, not to do the work.
- Don't be afraid to admit to your student that you do not know an answer.  
Tell her that you will find the answer and then follow through.

Don't use any of the following "Tutoring Dialogue No-No's" (I know a lot of these probably seem pretty obvious, but it's better to be clear on what's appropriate)

- "I'm gonna teach you"
- "Don't ask me, I don't know!"
- "Here, let me do it for you."
- "You can't do this level work, why don't you go back and take the first class over again?"
- "Oh, don't worry about this class. She never gives tough exams."
- "You can't understand this!? Anybody could do this third grade work!"
- "Dummy, don't sign that paper there!"  
"The administration? They don't know how to run the school!"
- "You're a True Cross Believer? When did you get mixed up with that strange cult?"
- "If you want my advice, I'd think about it long and hard before taking the second term of this subject."
- "I heard that you've been in Seg. What have you done now?"
- "Dr. Whosit sure is an oddball, isn't he? You'll never learn anything from him."
- "Here I am coming every day to help you out with your problems, and you haven't even finished your homework!"
- "Look, we're running out of time. Let me do the talking or you'll never understand."
- "I really enjoy working with disadvantaged students."