

turning to a tutor

IS YOUR CHILD HAVING TROUBLE MAKING GOOD GRADES? A TUTOR MAY BE THE BEST LESSON PLAN.

IT'S TOUGH BEING A STUDENT NOWADAYS. Colleges seem to tighten their admission standards every year. Even elementary schoolers face challenges, thanks to federally mandated tests. So what's a kid, and his or her parents, to do? Turn to tutoring.

Not that many years ago, people didn't talk about tutors. The perception was that anyone who needed extra class work help probably wasn't going to climb very far up the educational ladder. That wasn't necessarily so then and it's definitely not the case now.

More folks are seeking out one-on-one schooling help without any qualms. Even better, some of the tutoring is free. But to find the appropriate and most cost-effective tutor, you've got to do your homework.

Why Do You Want a Tutor?

Your first step is determining why your child needs a tutor. Does your son have a learning disability, or does he simply need a bit of added attention to complete his homework? Does your daughter do well in most courses, but have difficulty understanding certain concepts in one subject? External issues also could contribute to classroom problems. Large class sizes limit the ability of instructors to provide needed attention. Curriculum changes or even a poor relationship with the teacher can lead to lower grades.

Other signals that your child may benefit from a tutor include:

- He seems to be trying, but his grades don't reflect that effort.
- She doesn't complete her homework or does so poorly.
- He shows an increasing lack of confidence and motivation about school.
- She is anxious about tests.

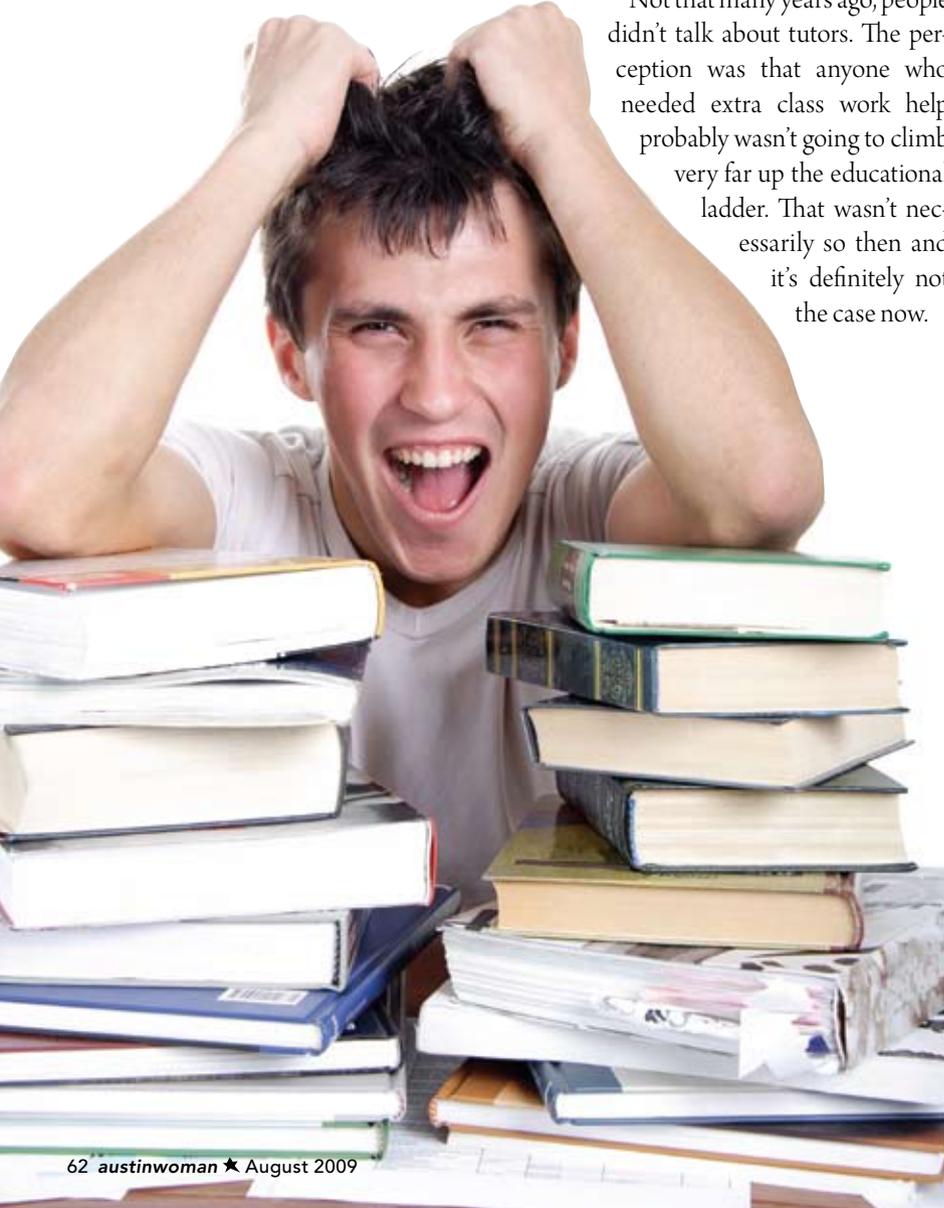
Once you figure out where the problem lies, you can find the right tutor.

Start at the School

Under federal No Child Left Behind Act guidelines, schools that are deemed "in need of improvement" for two or more consecutive years must provide free tutoring to children from low-income families.

Such options are available via the Austin Independent School District's Supplemental Educational Services (SES; www.austinisd.org/academics/ses/). The tutoring services are provided by state-approved instructors, said Mark Alvarado, coordinator of the SES program, and all costs are paid for by the school district. "It's just one of many options. We have numerous other programs, nonprofits that work on campus, local universities, Boys and Girls Clubs."

One of those nonprofits is Austin Partners in Education (APIE; www.austinpartners.org). (See our Special Feature



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profile of Executive Director Kathrin Brewer on pp. 54.) The group offers a variety of community-classroom volunteer programs in conjunction with the Austin school district. Linda Miracle retired in June as program supervisor for APIE's Victory tutoring program, but she remains an enthusiastic advocate of the effort. In addition to working with the AISD, the Victory program also partners with Austin Public Libraries and holds some of its sessions in those facilities.

Victory's one-on-one tutoring is provided by volunteers and covers all academic subjects for students grades 1-12. There is no charge for the tutoring, said Miracle, as long as the student's parents pay Austin city taxes. While most of those taking advantage of Victory tutoring are struggling with their regular classroom work, Miracle noted that the program also offers help to advanced placement and honors students who are looking to improve or maintain their grades. "What we do is provide a different perspective," said Miracle. "Sometimes just coming at the material in another way is what it takes." Tutoring hours at most sites are from 3 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. That time frame, said Miracle, works well for older students who have after-school activities.

While tutoring through a school district or volunteer program is convenient and the price is right, the major drawback is that such programs are limited to the school year. So if your child needs some help between semesters, you'll have to look elsewhere.

Pick a Private Tutor

One possibility for year-round help is a private tutor. An informal arrangement, such as hiring the honors student down the block, could be all you need to help your child's academic performance improve. A reasonable price for this type of tutoring is \$10-to-\$15 an hour.

This type of tutoring usually is fine for basic homework help, but if you want more analysis of your child's learning issues, you'll want to hire a professional. Tutors with several years of experience, typically in the academic arena, can combine personal attention with proven teaching methods.

Kathy Donnell of Alpine retired last year after 21 years of teaching fifth and sixth graders. She now tutors students at those

grade levels. "My school asked if I wanted to substitute teach and I said, 'no, I didn't want to do that,'" said Donnell. "I wanted to work but had to be in a job where I could set my own hours and get paid enough to make it worthwhile." That's exactly what she got when she agreed, at the school principal's follow-up request, to tutor. Her contract arrangement with the school is her main job now, but she also has picked up a few private tutoring clients.

Most of Patrick Jones' students are a bit older. Since moving to Austin in 2007, his Just Math Tutoring business (www.justmath-tutoring.com) has grown primarily thanks to the demands of The University of Texas calculus program. "UT has been a real plus for me. They've got one of the hardest calculus sequences I've seen anywhere," said Jones, who has a Masters degree in mathematics from the University of Louisville, KY.

Jones was a teaching assistant at Vanderbilt before his move to Texas, and still teaches the occasional class at Austin Community College. But his primary job now is tutoring, for which his base rate is \$55 per hour.

Find a Franchise

National tutoring chains are another option. The most well-known are Sylvan, Huntington and Kumon. In the greater Austin area, each company has several learning centers; their online search engines can help you find the nearest facility. Typical monthly charges range from \$85-to-\$115 per subject, per month. In addition, most also charge a registration fee of \$30-to-\$50. An advantage of franchise operations is that they also often offer payment plans. A drawback of chain programs is that the tutoring sometimes is in small groups, three to four students to one tutor, rather than the one-on-one attention you get from a private tutor.

Explore Online Options

New technologies also have produced changes in the tutoring field. Sylvan offers an online program. Other web-based tutoring is available via MathNerds.com or Tutor.com. Cyber tutoring might be preferable if your child is shy, your family has scheduling

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canine specialist certificate from Triple Crown Dog Training Academy. She trains animals with positive reinforcement in the form of clicker training rather than shock collars, to which she is adamantly opposed. In her spare time, Phenix fosters animals. In the last 15 years, she and her husband Jeff Hebert, have fostered approximately 400 dogs.

"I'm doing what I'm doing to keep dogs from going to shelters," Phenix said. "Basically that is my motivation."

Her effective communication skills from the business world have helped her to explain her clients' inappropriate behaviors with their animals in diplomatic ways.

"I have more of a reason to be blunt if I need to for the dog, than I ever did for an author," she said. "It means more to me personally to help a dog, because people have choices, but dogs don't have any choices."

Kim Chapman came to Phenix in March 2009 because her chocolate Lab, Jessie, was experiencing behavioral and aggression issues. Chapman was devastated by the thought of having to re-home her. She began taking private lessons from Phenix and learned techniques that helped her get Jessie under control.

"She has a passion for animals and it really comes through in her instruction," Chapman said. "I'm convinced that she cares for each animal she teaches as if it were her own."

Phenix urges women considering a career change to surround themselves with supportive people and follow their passion. She credits her husband, who provided her with financial help in the early days of her career, with being her main support system for more than 11 years. He also serves as her "in-house techie" and feeds their four horses and seven donkeys.

"Don't be stuck in a job that bores you or stresses you," she said. "Life's too short – Janice [her friend] was

right, it's not a dress rehearsal."

Today, Phenix has achieved success in her new role as a dog trainer. She works as an independent contractor at Zoot Pets in Georgetown. She is even considering writing a book about her dog named Monster. When asked if she ever wishes she could revert back to life as a businesswoman, she paused and shook her head, "No."

"Not for a second," she said. "I love working with dogs and I love working with people who love dogs. You have to follow your passion whatever it is."

Just as Leann Phenix took center stage in her own life and molded her career into something she loves to do every day, she teaches people to live happily with their animals. After all, their lives aren't dress rehearsals either. ★

MORE INFO

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profiles," he says, super-enthusiastically. Indeed, on my recent visit I found at least 15 different rosés, still and sparkling, from many wine-producing regions in the world. I feel like a kid in a candy store. So many rosés I'd never seen before! Upon his recommendation, we ordered a nice glass of Domaine de la Petit Marie Bourgueil rosé of Cabernet Franc from the Loire. Almost peachy in hue, dry and refreshing, we paired it with a plate of ivory salmon carpaccio with tiny melon balls and shaved fresh asparagus. Oh man, was that good. We moved on to Chateau Valcombe's Côtes de Ventoux rosé, made from Syrah and Grenache – ultra-dry, lots of minerality and a light tinge of grapefruit; then on to the bright Rosa del Golfo Rosato del Salento, a blend of Negroamaro and