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What to Consider Before Hiring a Tutor

Hiring a tutor for your child or for yourself is often a confusing and complicated matter. Currently, we estimate that there are over two million people practicing tutoring. These individuals may be independent private practice tutors, or they may work for a larger practice, a franchised practice, a community program, a faith based program, or a school based initiative. Whether volunteer or paid, all tutors should abide by the standards of practice and code of ethics as set forth by the National Tutoring Association. All tutors should be trained and certified in the professional practice of tutoring.

So how do you know who will be a good fit for your student? Who will deliver the services best suited for your student's needs and goals? Tutors have the unique ability and responsibility to interact with your student on a holistic level, meaning that the tutor and student will work together as a learning team to meet certain goals and benchmarks of success. Tutors not only deliver content information, they motivate, coach, challenge, and provide feedback to students. Well trained and experienced tutors work with the student's overall study skills, not just the academic assignment at hand. But you must keep in mind that tutors are not magicians and that no tutor should ever guarantee that your student will attain certain results in any given period of time. The goal for every tutor should be overall progress for the student which is measured in academic success, improved self-esteem, and increased independence as a learner.

Hiring a tutor should be approached in the same manner as hiring any other professional. Ask questions, look carefully at references, and use your instinct as to whether this tutor is a good fit for your student. Your student should be present at the initial interview so that you can receive feedback from your student before making a final hiring decision. After all, the student is 50% of the learning team, and as such, needs to be involved from the onset.

Ask about the following

✓ Credentials – Don't be afraid to ask for proof of credentials, i.e. transcript copies, copies of state teaching certificates, tutor certification, proof of other specialized training. Ask the tutor to provide a complete resume.

✓ Letters of Recommendation -- Make sure that the letters speak to the person's ability as a tutor and not just matters of general character. Letters should be current and include full contact information for the person making the recommendation. Above all, make the calls necessary to verify these recommendations.

✓ A Tutorial Plan -- Give the tutor a list of your concerns and goals for your student. Ask the tutor to offer a basic plan for how he or she will assist your child. How will the tutor conduct an initial assessment of your student's academic needs and challenges? How will success be measured? When will feedback be provided to you and/or the student's teacher?

✓ Demonstration -- Watch the tutor guide your student through a small portion of one lesson. How does the tutor approach the student? Where does the tutor sit; does the tutor respect your child's personal space? How is the tutor's intent conveyed to your student? Does the tutor write on your student's paper or does the tutor allow the student to make corrections as needed? Is your student allowed to ask numerous questions? Is the tutor patient, professional in mannerism, tone of voice and information delivery? Does the tutor give your student time to process and answer the question before offering the solution? Does the tutor offer sincere praise?

✓ Fees – Ask the tutor for a detailed pricing plan, i.e. how many sessions at what cost per session. Be sure you are clear about payment requirements, rules about missed appointments, and miscellaneous fees for testing and materials.

✓ Location -- Where will the tutor meet your student? At your home with supervision? In a public place such as a library? In a dedicated learning center? Tutors should never meet with your student in a location where there is no other adult present.

✓ Insurance -- Does the tutor carry professional liability insurance? Has the tutor been recently background checked?

✓ Professional Affiliations – To what professional association does the tutor belong? How does the tutor participate in the overall improvement of the tutorial practice? Does the tutor stay current regarding innovative methods and strategies?

✓ Additional Questions -- How long have you been tutoring? Why do you enjoy tutoring? How many students are you currently working with? When do you become frustrated with students? How do you communicate with a student who clearly isn't "getting it"? How do you define your role as the tutor? What is my role as the parent? How will you communicate with my student's teacher(s) and how often?

Finally, if any red flag sends off an internal warning signal, do not hire that tutor. You are the person who knows your student better than anyone else. You and your student must feel comfortable in this tutorial relationship. The bottom line is that no matter who recommends the tutor, interview more than one tutor if you have any nagging thoughts in the back of your mind when making the hiring decision.