

BY KELLY ST. JOHN REGIER



Is it time for a tutor?

If you sense your child is struggling, get help sooner than later.

It is a question that most parents will probably ponder at least once during their children's school careers: Does my child need outside help with his academics? Perhaps as a family, you've tried to help, but even with your assistance and extra studying, you haven't seen the progress you'd hoped for.

It might be time for a tutor.

Sometimes the need for a tutor is very obvious: Perhaps your child's grades on recent tests have plummeted, or his teacher has recommended that the family seek additional help.

Qualified tutors can make a difference in a wide range of situations, including ensuring that students succeed on standardized exams, providing extra enrichment

to advanced students and filling in gaps that classroom teachers don't cover during limited school hours.

"The vast majority of people who seek out tutors do so because they are at risk academically," says Dr. Sandi Ayaz, executive director of the National Tutoring Association (ntatutor.com). "A tutor can look at a student holistically and say, 'What's the disconnect with this student, and how can we reconnect him to the material being covered in the classroom?'"

If your child's grades keep falling despite his best efforts, it's likely time to give him extra support. A tutor can work one-on-one with him to pinpoint the source of confusion or error. If your child's teacher recommends a tutor, or your child believes

that one is necessary, it's definitely time for you to act.

But finding the right tutor for your child isn't as easy as opening a phone book, advises Ayaz. And considering that the nationwide average cost for tutoring can be pricey – about \$25 to \$35 per hour, and even higher in many areas of California – parents want to make sure they are making a wise investment.

By far the most important thing a parent needs to do when hiring a tutor is to get a number of personal references and check them out. Ayaz says that, instead of picking a name off a bulletin board or Craigslist, parents should rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from other parents, teachers, guidance counselors



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and faith-based organizations.

Then, when parents have a name, “Get on the phone and check those references,” says Ayaz. “Have they been reliable and responsible? Does your child like them?”

Parents should not be afraid to ask for proof of credentials, such as a state teaching certificate, tutor certification or school transcripts.

Ayaz recommends that parents invite their child to sit in on interviews with potential tutors.

“Your student is the one who has to work with this person,” Ayaz says. “He has to be involved in the selection process. Ask for a 10-minute demonstration so you can see how they interact together. You can see if your child feels comfortable. Then talk to him after the candidate leaves to see if he likes [the prospective tutor].”

Ayaz recommends that tutors come to the child’s home with a parent or other adult present. They should carry liability insurance and have recently gone through a background check.

“I would never recommend that a child go to the tutor’s home or even meet in a library,” she says. “That offers a false sense of security.”

Ayaz notes that parents should also be

wary of hiring a tutor who promises too much.

“They are not miracle workers,” she says. “If you meet someone who says, ‘I’m going to take your student from a C to an A,’ don’t hire that person.”

Often, the reason a child is struggling is because his unique learning preference doesn’t match with his teacher’s style of instructing, says Ayaz. That is why, while many schoolteachers work as successful tutors outside the classroom, she would never recommend that parents hire their child’s own teacher for tutoring.

If your struggling student is in middle school or high school, Ayaz recommends that families should not discount finding someone their child’s own age to work with him.

“Research tells us that the most effective tutoring is peer-to-peer,” says Ayaz. “They trust each other. It’s amazing.”

Making the decision to hire a tutor and finding the right one can make all the difference to help your child get his education back on track.

“A tutor’s job is really to get *fired*,” says Ayaz. “The ultimate goal is to create an independent learner who doesn’t need them anymore.” 