

tutorial on tutoring

It's not just accepted these days, it's embraced. Here's why.

When I was in fifth grade, I was asked to tutor a first grader who was struggling with reading skills. I met my tutee twice a week in the school library where he read aloud and I applauded his efforts and helped with difficult words.

That was about 30 years ago, and tutoring has come a long way, but still has the same goals—improving a child's chances for academic success. Tutors come in all ages and types, from senior citizens to fifth graders to professionals with tutoring services to Ivy League graduates hired specifically to prepare teenagers for the SATs (to the tune of about \$400 an hour for *those* services).

Most educators consider tutoring to be an excellent option for improving academic achievement. Entrepreneurs have recognized this and jumped on board. According to the latest statistics, nationally tutoring has grown into a four-billion dollar industry, not including freelance tutors. But how do you know if your child needs tutoring? At what age should tutoring start? And what kind of qualifications do you look for in a tutor?

where do I start?

There are many different types of tutoring businesses these days, from Kaplan to Sylvan to the Princeton Review. They all offer academic help—some for a premium price, some at a sliding scale dependent on income.

The National Tutoring Association (NTA) represents the interests of more than 16,000 tutors in the United States and seven other countries, but estimates that there are more than two million

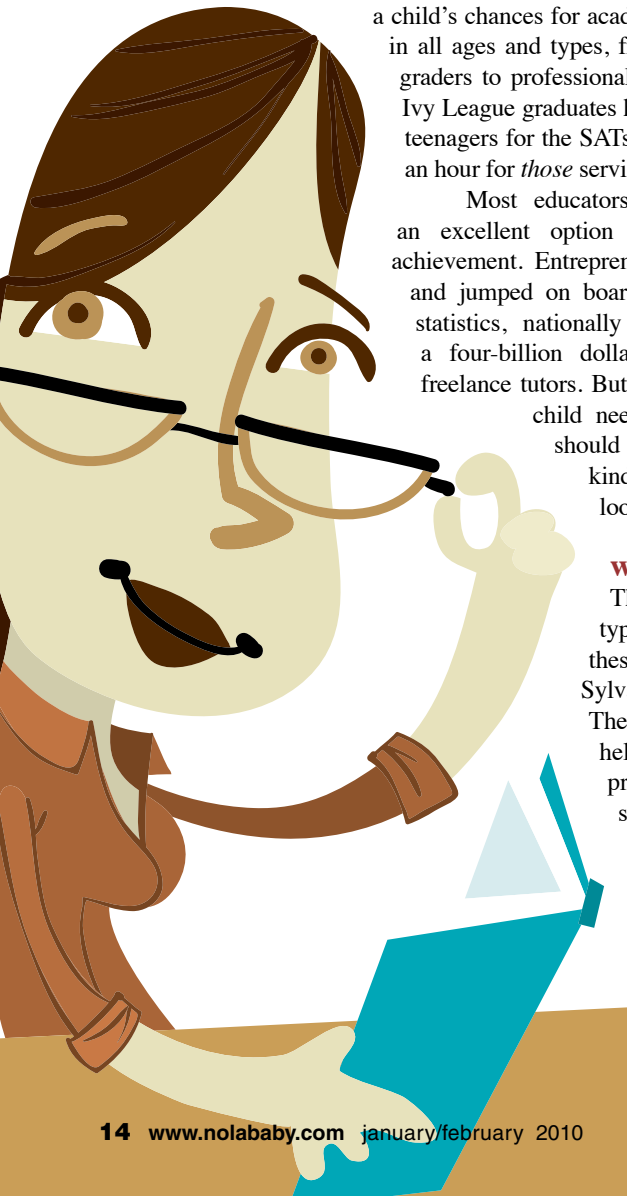
people practicing as tutors. The NTA is working to create a high standard for the industry by advocating for tutor certification, supporting research into best practices, and promoting a tutor "code of ethics."

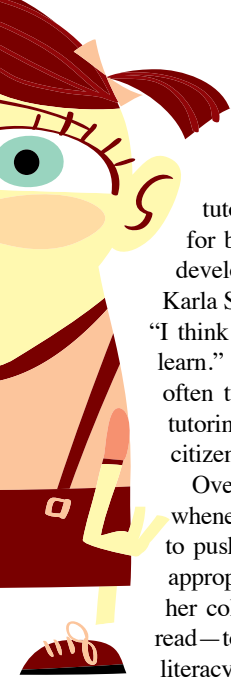
Many tutoring businesses offer certification, and complete all the background work for you: making sure the tutors have the appropriate qualifications and credentials, collecting letters of reference, and conducting rigorous interviews and criminal background checks. The most important task for parents in search of a tutor is finding a good fit for their child. A tutor will be working very closely with a child, helping with academic content as well as providing achievement motivation, coaching, and determining the right methods that will make him or her flourish academically.

When selecting a tutor, parents should make sure that he or she has the proper credentials and will develop a tutorial plan addressing their child's specific needs. The tutor should be patient and professional and provide information on how they will provide feedback about the child's progress. The student, tutor and parents should have very clear-cut goals and a plan to achieve those goals.

"Tutoring can give a student the extra boost and resulting confidence he or she needs," says Joni Tierce, a Gifted English faculty member at Warren Easton Senior High School in NOLA. "[O]ne on one instruction can help a child clarify material and learn strategies about how she best learns. Many students need help with organization and study habits more than actual help with the material. Tutoring often provides this structure and practice."

Joni adds, however, that she has concerns about some aspects of tutoring: "What if a child begins to believe that she cannot succeed without tutoring and loses faith in her own abilities? Tutors, teachers and parents need to be sensitive about the inadvertent results of tutoring and talk about the child's strengths and reasons for the tutoring." Teachers and experts agree that the goal should always include helping the child become a passionate and *independent* learner.





at what age should tutoring start?

There are varying opinions on what age tutoring should begin. Joni says that she doesn't believe tutoring should start very young as "this could be a recipe for burn out. [W]e need to allow young children time to develop at different paces."

Karla San Martin, a teacher at the International School, says, "I think the key is not so much age, but need and desire to learn." Because Karla teaches in French and Spanish, she often tutors many different ages in foreign languages; her tutoring students range in age from five years old to senior citizens.

Overall, tutoring experts say a child should get help whenever they need it, as long as tutoring isn't used as a means to push a child academically past what is developmentally appropriate. Hiring a tutor to help a five-year-old to learn her colors—fine. Hiring a tutor to teach a five-year-old to read—too much, too soon. (The countries with the highest literacy rates and math and science skills do not begin formal academic instruction in these subjects until age seven.)

knowing if your child needs a tutor

Joni explains that, "many parents recognize that their children need help in a specific area before their teachers." Karla also believes parental awareness is very important, and has first-hand experience with this as a mother. "I was very in tune to my son's struggle from his first years in school, even as early as pre-k," she says. "At every grade level, his teachers at some point or another would ask to speak to me. They always seemed concerned that he [was] putting forth

his best effort, when verbally tested he knew the material, yet... his scores didn't reflect the knowledge he had attained."

Karla explains that, "at home, homework that needed to take only about 10 minutes" took up to an hour. She advises parents that grades and feedback from teachers only account for a small portion of the big picture; parents have the best insight. "[Parents] have a

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better understanding of [their] child's temperament, personality, and disposition," she says.

Still, teachers often can identify learning difficulties, Karla says. "I have experience working with different grade levels and different style learners throughout the day," she says. "Sometimes I can determine if a child is having more difficulty in one area versus the other. Spending hours a week with each child and being exposed to hundreds in the same age group gives me a basic guide on where the average skill level should be in each area."

To help parents know if their child might need a tutor, Karla recommends maintaining a close relationship with both their child and her teachers, and keeping all lines of communication open.

Marci Johnson, Ed.M., a frequent contributor to nola baby & family, worked in the field of education for 20 years and now is a freelance writer and fulltime Mom. She and her husband live Uptown with their two children, Annabelle (five) and Henry (three).