

# Northfield Reads & Counts Tutor Manual

St. Olaf College and Carleton College  
Northfield Public Schools

**Section 3: Relationships and Behavioral Information**

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## The First Day—Getting to Know Your Student

The first day is your opportunity to begin creating the trusting and respectful atmosphere that will make your future tutoring sessions the most productive. However, getting to know your student will be an ongoing process. It is important to remember that you are in a role in which the student will look up to you and may consider you a friend. Many of the youth you will be working with have few other adults who can offer them the undivided attention you can provide. You should be friendly with the student, but not become so close that you lose the student's respect as an authority figure. The following are some suggestions on how to begin your first session.

1. Learn your student's name and how to pronounce and spell it correctly. Ask if your student has a preferred nickname.
2. Tell your student about yourself and what you do at college. Explain why you tutor.
3. Ask your student to give you a tour of the school and have him/her show you his/her classroom.
4. Ask about the student's interests and family.
  - a. What is his/her favorite song, sport, place to go to, TV show?
  - b. How many siblings does he/she have?
  - c. What is one profession that he/she would like to try when he/she grows up?
  - d. When is his/her birthday?
  - e. Ask your student to tell you about his/her friends.
5. Ask about your student's school.
  - a. What is his/her teacher's name?
  - b. What is his/her favorite subject? About what does he/she like to read?
  - c. What is his/her favorite after school activity?
  - d. What is the best part of school?
6. Talk about tutoring and what you will be doing each day. Ask the student what he/she would like to work on or which subject with which he/she would like more help. Set clear goals for each tutoring session and for the term/semester.
7. Explain to your student that you have made a commitment to be at all of the tutoring sessions and that the only time you won't be there is when you're sick or on a college break. Ask the student to make the same commitment and come to all the tutoring sessions as well.

# Hello, what's your name?

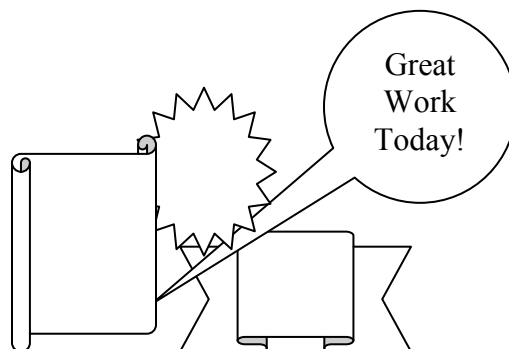
► Techniques that encourage positive interactions will help you get acquainted and establish a positive rapport with the student(s) with which you work.

- Use the student's preferred name/nickname
- Establish eye contact
- Ask about the student's day
- Be approachable, smile
- Give the student your undivided attention
- Listen carefully at all times
- Respect your student's individuality and his/her right to make his/her own choices
- Try to relate to events of interest to your student
- Do not be afraid to make mistakes or to say that you do not know the answer
- Establish rules and expectations immediately

### Examples of Positive Verbal Reinforcement and Encouraging Statements

- \* Well done!
- \* I'm proud of you.
- \* You tried hard.
- \* That's a rough one, but I'm sure you'll work it out.
- \* It looks as if you really worked hard on that.
- \* What an imagination!
- \* Way to go!
- \* I like the way you did that.
- \* Look at the progress you've made!
- \* See how much you've improved?
- \* You are really becoming an expert at this.
- \* I like the way you are working.

- \* Good thinking!
- \* I think you should show this to your parents.
- \* That's certainly one way of looking at it.
- \* I knew you could do it.
- \* Knowing you, I'm sure you'll figure it out/ do fine.
- \* You're improving in...(a skill).
- \* That's another one you got right.
- \* I'm proud of the way you worked today.
- \* This is nicely done.



## **Relationships and Boundaries**

As a tutor you will also frequently act as a mentor to your student. It is likely, and beneficial to your tutoring effort, that you will develop a close relationship with your student. However, it is important to be aware of the boundaries that should not be crossed when working with children. The following are guidelines that may be helpful to you throughout your tutoring experience.

- ❖ **Understand that your student will be reluctant to trust you.**  
Be patient. It may take some time to build trust between you and your student. Young people do not have many opportunities to be friends with interested and concerned adults (besides their parents). Realize when your student is testing you and your commitment to the relationship. Always remain calm and consistent, as well as interested in the work you do with your student.
- ❖ **Offer reassurance and support.**  
Remind your student that you are available to talk and that you believe in his/her ability to learn.
- ❖ **Be a good listener.**
- ❖ **Do not force your student to discuss personal issues with you.**  
Delving into your student's personal or family life, particularly early in the relationship, is usually not productive. It is unwise to ask youth to discuss information they may be ashamed of, such as a criminal record or where his/her family does their shopping. If your student resists sharing information, do not push; silence does not mean your student is rejecting your relationship. It is important not to measure the success of your tutoring sessions by the extent of your student's disclosure. Conversely, you may be surprised by how much your student shares without inquiry from you.
- ❖ **Speak with a professional if you need.**  
If you believe something may be wrong in your student's home life, share your concern with the student's teacher or the Tutoring Coordinator.
- ❖ **Suggest ways to solve problems.**  
Try to listen carefully and offer possible solutions without passing judgment. Give practical suggestions (rather than lecture your point of view) and let the student decide how to move forward.
- ❖ **Have realistic expectations.**  
Many mentors get discouraged when they feel their tutees aren't "turning their lives around" or making big academic improvements. Although you will certainly have an impact on your student, it is unrealistic to expect that your student's life will be transformed through your relationship. Gains may be small (for example, missing fewer days of school, or increased motivation to do homework) but they are nonetheless signs of progress. Adjusting your expectations and understanding that your student may not always express gratitude directly will prevent mentor/tutor burnout and frustration.
- ❖ **Attempt to understand your student's family, social class and culture.**

## **Stages of a Relationship**

### **Stage One—Developing Rapport and Building Trust**

This is the most critical stage of the relationship—the “getting to know you” phase.

- ❑ Goal Setting—What is it that you and your student will accomplish during your time together? Young people often do not learn goal setting, so help to model brainstorming, writing and planning how to achieve goals.
- ❑ Testing—Youth will frequently use testing as a coping or defense mechanism to determine whether they can trust you. For example, a student may be distant, refuse to participate or intentionally skip a session to test your response.
- ❑ Building Trust—The tutor needs to lay down the groundwork for a trusting relationship. The tutor should be predictable and consistent. The tutor should assure the student that conversations will remain confidential (unless the student or another is in a dangerous situation) and exchange expectations.

### **Stage Two—Reaching Goals**

The relationship has reached the middle stage when you and your student have learned to trust one another. In this stage, there should be progress towards the student’s goals.

- ❑ Allow for Rocky and Smooth Times—All relationships will have ups and downs, be prepared for these fluctuations.
- ❑ Affirm the Uniqueness of the Relationship—It can be helpful to do a special activity to affirm the relationship (do an activity that is new and different).
- ❑ Rely on Staff and Resource Support—Contact the student’s teacher or the Tutoring Coordinator with questions. Tutors can also exchange experiences, ideas and questions with other tutors.

### **Stage Three—Closure**

Model a positive and fulfilling manner to end a relationship and say goodbye. It is critical to not overlook this stage.

- ❑ Identify Natural Emotions—Model this behavior by expressing your feelings at the end of your relationship, for example, “I am going to miss you, we have had so much fun together this semester.” Understand, however, that your student may not reciprocate; he/she may find it uncomfortable to say what he/she feels.
- ❑ Provide Options—Do not wait until the very last meeting to say goodbye. Make sure to address the issue well in advance so as to allow your student to get used to the idea. Provide options for saying goodbye in a healthy, respectful and affirming manner.
- ❑ Address Keeping in Touch—This is unique to each tutor-tutee pair. If both the tutor and student would like to keep in touch during the summer or after the tutor graduates, then discuss how to do so (letters, emails, or cell phones). It is important to not assume that a student would like to keep in touch and to arrange communication that is suitable to both. Also, any communication/relationship/tutoring support offered outside of school, will be independent of Northfield Reads and Counts.

## **Responding to Inappropriate Behavior**

### **Preventative Measures**

The best way to deal with inappropriate behavior is to prevent it from occurring. Preventing inappropriate behavior becomes much easier if you develop a caring relationship with a child. If a child can count on you to respect him/her, be consistent, listen, and be empathetic, then he/she will be more likely to act in appropriate ways. Thus it is important to create a positive and respectful atmosphere. The following are some suggestions to help you create and maintain this type of atmosphere.

- ✓ During your first session, be clear about what is appropriate behavior and be consistent about reminding your student and enforcing the specified behavior.
- ✓ Remember that you are a role model for appropriate behavior. Modeling appropriate behavior and comments demonstrates the behavior you expect and can also help your student develop caring behavior towards others.
- ✓ Always give feedback in a positive manner.
- ✓ Avoid using sarcasm with children and youth.
- ✓ Keep your student actively involved and interested by using materials or talking through problems.
- ✓ Recognize that much misbehavior is an avoidance tactic to distract your attention from a task with which the student is struggling. Verbalize this avoidance tactic and find an aspect about the task that the student has grasped well and review that material. Try to build the student's confidence in his/her ability to complete the task.
- ✓ Learn to notice when your student is having a bad day and tailor your activities to the specific circumstances at hand. Fatigue, anger, over stimulation, hunger, frustration or a need for attention or a sense of control are often the root causes of misbehavior. Try to anticipate disruptive behavior and head it off with a diversion, such as a new activity or a break in the work.
- ✓ Always remember that a child's inappropriate methods of dealing with difficulties can be unlearned and more appropriate behaviors can be learned.
- ✓ Talk with your student's teacher about strategies or phrases that might be helpful to encourage your student to cooperate.



## **Ethical Considerations of Behavior Management**

Behavior management should be viewed as an opportunity for teaching and not as an opportunity for punishment. While tutors are not the parents, tutors may need to deal with difficult situations. Please remember to always consult the teacher if a student is experiencing a difficult moment.

- ✓ Avoid embarrassing a student.
- ✓ Suggestions should be in the form of constructive criticism that occurs in private.
- ✓ Speak to the youth in a firm, polite, and calm voice. Do not raise your voice. Point out specifically what behavior needs to stop. The student needs to know you are objecting to their behavior, not to him/her as a person.
- ✓ Never touch a student who is upset. Calmly suggest options of how to move forward and do not allow a student to gain control of a situation by using inappropriate behavior.
- ✓ Never engage in a power struggle. Strive for win/win resolutions to difficulties. Whenever possible, make it seem as though the student has control over his/her consequences.
- ✓ Never ignore a student's inappropriate behavior or respond with sarcasm or violent language or actions. Identify the behavior as inappropriate and move directly back to the task at hand.
- ✓ Make sure to always thank students who are trying to improve their behavior, no matter how small the improvement or change.



## **Characteristics of Youth Who Are Frequently Identified for Tutoring**

Your student may:

1. Believe he/she cannot succeed in school.
2. Be easily distracted.
3. Lack self-confidence.
4. Have poor attendance.
5. Be troubled by problems outside of school that affect his/her academics.
6. Have few role models who have gone to college.
7. Be labeled as an “underachiever”, “trouble-causer” or “at-risk” student.
8. Have suffered from poor teaching or neglect in earlier grades.

Tutors should recognize that making progress against these self-beliefs or in building a student's ability to overcome these challenges is a marker of a successful tutoring relationship (in addition to the more traditional marker of academic progress or improved school performance).

## Why Positive Reinforcement?

- Prescribing behavioral rules alone is relatively ineffective in changing behavior.
- Learning not to respond to disruptive behavior is important for effective teaching.
- It is important that the teacher/tutor sets a good example by taking responsibility for his/her own behavior.
- A tutor's praise is important in maintaining a well functioning session.
- It is not only the total amount of praise given by the teacher/tutor that is important for good classroom management, but when and to whom the praise is given.
- Just being nice is not enough.
- Criticisms are found not to function as punishers but as reinforcers for misbehavior.



## Behavior Management Techniques

Regardless of the type of atmosphere you create, tutors are bound to encounter behavioral problems or difficult situations. The following are some strategies to try to handle these situations. Do not forget that teachers and on-site staff are also resources for you to consult if a problem persists.

### Forced Choices

Give power to the student to decide their own consequences in the event that warnings to stop inappropriate behavior have failed. Ensure that the options you provide are real possibilities (do not use empty threats) and be prepared to choose for the student in the event he/she refuses.

For example:

- “Would you like to start on your homework reading assignment with me, or read this book from the library together? It’s up to you.”
- “You need to take a time out. You can sit at this table or in that chair. You choose where you want to take it.”

### Incentives

Small rewards can help a student make the right choice; however, remember that rewards are not necessarily tangible items. Playing a game or reading a favorite book might be good rewards for work on a difficult assignment. Only offer incentives you can provide, or promises you intend to keep.

Do not retroactively deny incentives; allow the student the opportunity to work towards the incentive.

For example:

- “I would have given you a star if you had sat in your chair.”

### Redirection

Focus a child's energy on a more positive activity before a bad choice is made by providing an alternative activity tailored to the student.

For example:

- A child is stomping on pieces of chalk in order to smash them. "Hey there, you've got some strong legs. I bet I can stand on one leg longer than you can!"
- "Did you know that I'm the thumb-war champion? I can't find anyone who can beat me. Do you want to try?"

### Natural Consequences

Remind students that there are consequences to all actions. Do not be condescending, but firm.

For example:

- "When shoving a chair in anger, it might hit your knee and hurt you. We all need to be aware of the consequences of our actions."

### Positive Language and Labeling

Labeling identifies the behavior of the student's that is inappropriate, and it is not meant to characterize him/her. Follow the label with language that lets the student know how he/she can make a wise behavior choice. Avoid using a command you cannot enforce.

For example:

- "You're teasing. Instead, why don't you tell Tommy about the game of scrabble we just played."
- "The window needs to stay shut," as opposed to "Shut the window."



### **Model for Giving Feedback**

- Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements that tend to blame or induce shame or guilt.
- Describe the behavior ("Mary was hit in the face with a ball").
- Express how you feel ("I feel upset because Mary is hurt").
- Be specific ("The rule is, the ball needs to make contact below the knees").
- State the consequences ("Following the rules will keep everyone safe").
- A logical consequence if negative behavior continues or limit the child's choices ("The child not following the rules would be asked to leave the game").