



Working with Teens To Build Student Success

It's not about giving advice.
It's about listening.

Frontier College

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Frontier College

35 Jackes Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M4T 1E2

Tel: (416) 923-3591 OR [toll free] 1-800-555-6523

Fax: (416) 323-3522

Email: information@frontiercollege.ca

Web: www.frontiercollege.ca

As part of the Ontario Homework Club Institutes project, Frontier College has also developed the following resources to support Ontario's student success strategy:

- A Student Success Leader's Resource – Homework Clubs: How to Set Them Up/ How to Run Them
- A Tutor's Guide for Supporting Ontario's Student Success Strategy: Reading and Writing with Youth
- How to Train Homework Club Volunteers to Support Ontario's Student Success Strategy
- Final Research Report – The Keys to Success for Setting Up an Effective Homework Club

Frontier College was commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education to develop these resources.

Working with Teens to Build Student Success

By Lorna Corzine and Maureen Anglin

Edited by Erica Martin

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You have decided to help teenagers develop their academic skills. As a tutor, you will play an important role in a teen's life. Studies have shown that tutors can significantly improve students' levels of academic success. You will help students to set goals, become more motivated and realize the importance of education. You will also help students to:

- Develop positive relationships with adults
- Increase their level of school engagement
- Become more comfortable around others
- Enhance their self-esteem
- Develop a positive view of the future. (Search Institute, 2004)

These experiences help young people grow up to be healthy, caring and responsible members of the community.

For many adults, the idea of working with teenagers can be quite daunting. Some adults wonder if they will be able to relate to youth. Others are afraid they will be asked questions they don't know the answers to (and maybe didn't understand even when they studied the subject some years ago). Still others imagine their students will be versions of the monsters that they were when they were teens. However, as this manual demonstrates, working with teenagers does not have to be a difficult experience.

This resource manual will help you to develop a positive relationship with teenagers. It begins by discussing communication strategies such as active listening and cross-cultural communication skills. It then presents ways to motivate and encourage teens by building their self-esteem and by being a good mentor and learning coach. The final section outlines how to deal with challenges that you may encounter when working with teens.

In the appendices, you will find exercises and handouts for trainers to use during tutor training sessions. The manual clearly indicates when to use which exercise.

A final note about language: although the word "students" is used in its plural form, this manual is designed to help those who will be working with teenagers either one-to-one or in small groups.

Enjoy working with teens!

ACTIVE LISTENING

When you are working with teens, **do not ask too many questions.**

Once you can do this, you are well on your way to having a good relationship with teenagers.

Active listening is crucial to good communication with teenagers (and others!). To be an active listener:

You must be open-minded and focussed on the person with whom you are speaking. You must keep in mind that you should talk very little, reserve judgement and refrain from giving advice. The focus of the discussion should be on encouraging the student to talk. (Brackenbury, 1995, p. 45)

As an active listener, you must want to help and listen. Rather than judging, you need to trust the other person's ability to cope with problems. Most importantly, you have to accept that the other person is unique (Harp, 2000, p. 9). Your job is not to offer suggestions but to encourage the speaker to find their own solutions.

Ten Commandments for Good Listening

(Adapted from Harp, 2000, p. 9)

1. Stop talking! You cannot listen if you are talking. Active listening includes:

- Facing the person who is speaking
- Making frequent eye contact (but not staring)
- Using an open posture: leaning forward slightly (but don't invade the other person's "comfort zone")
- Being relaxed
- Encouraging the other person through verbal cues ("tell me more", "give me an example") and non-verbal cues (nodding your head)

(Brackenbury, 1995, p. 37-38)

2. Respond to feelings. First, identify the emotion that the other person is feeling (see Appendix B for a list of emotions). Then, describe the emotion and form a response that enables communication.

Example: a student says, "I hate my teachers! They don't care about the kids."

A. Poor response: "That's not a very nice thing to say. I think some teachers really care."

→ This ignores the student's feelings. The student may feel that the tutor is preaching.

B. Better response: "It sounds as though you are feeling frustrated!" → This recognizes the student's feelings and allows further conversation. (Brackenbury, 1995, p. 51)

Trainer's Note: Use exercise 1 in Appendix A to practice this.

3. Pay attention to non-verbal cues. A lot of what we understand in a conversation comes from non-verbal cues. For example, we communicate with someone face-to-face more clearly than we can by e-mail, because we can see the other person's facial expressions, gestures, etc. Through experience, we learn to interpret non-verbal cues and use them to determine how another person is feeling.

Paying attention to what students are saying, including the subtext ("reading between the lines") and the non-verbal cues can help you figure out areas they need to work on. It helps to develop a trusting relationship. And it makes students feel important and thus encourages them to continue attending the tutoring program.

Trainer's Note: Use exercise 2 in Appendix A to practise this.

4. Ask open questions. These are questions that encourage others to talk about themselves. Unlike "yes-no" questions ("Do you like school?"), open questions ("What do you like most about school?") allow a longer response. Using open questions helps you to focus the discussion or discover more information.

Poor question: Do you like math?

Student: No.

Better question: What don't you like about math?

Student: Fractions! I just don't get it!

Tutor: Well, let's take a look. It looks like you're working on adding fractions. Which part are you having trouble with?

Student: I just don't get how you can add them. It doesn't make sense.

Tutor: I have an idea. Let's try drawing it out in pizza slices. Maybe if you see it, adding them will make more sense.

Trainer's Note: Use exercise 3 in Appendix A to practice this.

| |
|--|
| 5. Be patient! |
| 6. Clarify. Ask questions such as “So, you worked on adding fractions in class last week. What did you work on this week?”. This helps you – and other speakers – to determine the main points of what is being said. It also demonstrates that you are paying attention. |
| 7. Summarize. Review what was said, including both events and feelings. This ensures that all participants have understood the main points of the discussion. |
| 8. Go easy on criticism! Avoid responses like “If I were you ...” “I think you should ...” These statements put people down and do not allow effective problem solving. For more information, see the “Conversation Blockers” handout in Appendix B. |
| 9. Avoid statements of reassurance. These include responses like “Don’t worry about it!” “Everything will be okay” or “Forget about it”. These statements do not make people feel better. Instead, they weaken communication by making people withdraw. |
| 10. Use the five-step approach. Asking these five questions will help students resolve problems: <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. What is the problem?ii. What have you tried?iii. What else could you try?iv. What is your plan?v. (After students have tried to solve the problem) How did it go? |

“I Messages” (modified from Brackenbury, 1995, p. 26-27)

“I messages” are a way of speaking which acknowledge people’s feelings. They assertively describe what is going on inside the speaker by using positive statements instead of put-downs or blame. Modelling these messages and teaching students to use them will help students communicate effectively and resolve conflicts more easily.

“I messages” consist of three parts.

- A statement of feelings that usually begins with “I feel ...”
- A statement of fact beginning with “when you ...”
- The observed result of the behaviour using “because ...”

Instead of: “You make me mad when you yell at me.”

Use: “I feel angry when you talk to me with that tone of voice.” → an “I message”, giving the same information, but in a much less confrontational tone)

Example: a student says, “I hate math.”

Poor response: “Yeah, I hate math too. My teacher never cared”

Better response: “I had a hard time with math, too. I felt left out when the teacher never had enough time because I really struggled without her help.” → This demonstrates respect for the teacher and gives more information what happened. It can lead to further questions from students (“That’s what happens in my class. What did you do?”)

Trainer’s Note: Use exercise 4 in Appendix A to practice this.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

You may work with teens from a variety of cultural backgrounds. For example, you may be matched with aboriginal youth, teenagers from a low-income community or youth who are newcomers to Canada. Remember that difference is often invisible and that age, geography or economic circumstances also affect culture. In all cross-cultural situations be careful how you communicate. Also, be aware of the assumptions that you are making about the students you are working with.

Tips for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

- Focus on students' interests and concerns, not your own. Talk about activities that teens can do that are low-cost or free.
- Don't get too personal. Questions about family should be approached cautiously because of cultural differences and safety issues.
- Don't assume understanding. Ask students to summarize what you have said. This will confirm that they have understood.
- Encourage and praise students.
- Be patient when waiting for a response. Allow students ample time to respond.
- Be aware of differences in non-verbal communication (gestures, degree of eye contact, personal space, etc.).

Tips for Working with Newcomers to Canada

- Repeat new ideas by using different words to explain them.
- Avoid unnecessary or difficult words.
- Speak in the present tense whenever possible. For example, instead of saying "You will need your book tomorrow", say "Take your book tomorrow".
- Reinforce what you say by writing or drawing pictures whenever possible.
- Use facial and hand gestures to emphasize the meaning of words.
- Don't exaggerate or distort pronunciation.
- Don't shout or speak more loudly than normal.
- Consider whether your clothing is culturally appropriate.

Conversation Starters

- Begin with familiar topics (weather, occupation, sports, music, etc.).
- Share some information about yourself.
- Ask and encourage open questions (see page 3).

MENTORING

Mentoring is about listening and role-modelling. It is not counselling or giving advice. As a tutor, you will have an impact on teenagers' ideas about school and about the future. Because you are a volunteer, this role is even more pronounced: teenagers will recognize that you are giving your time to help them.

As a mentor, you will be setting an example. Be on time and come prepared. Show respect for the school/organization rules about clothing (including tattoos and piercings), electronics (use of cell phones, etc.), language and behaviour. By doing this, you are setting a precedent that some teens may follow.

The most difficult part of tutoring is establishing the fine line between being a tutor and a friend. As a tutor, your goal is to help students with their schoolwork. But at the beginning of each session, spend five minutes doing a "check-in". Ask students about their lives using open questions (see page 3). To develop a smooth rapport and an equal give-and-take, share general details about your life such as your favourite sports, your interests, your pets or your school/career. This sharing will help to develop the mentoring relationship by making students feel welcome. It is also a good sounding board for students' experiences or difficulties. However, be sure to redirect students to their homework after a few minutes!

Middle school and high school students require a different set of study skills from elementary school students. These skills must be learned and practiced, especially for students who are struggling with schoolwork. Talk to students about academic strategies that work for you. Give students copies of academic skills handouts (in Appendix B). Reinforce the use of good study skills through demonstration and practical application. By modelling study skills and encouraging students to use them, you can help students along the road to academic success. (For more information about helping students succeed in school, please see *A Tutor's Guide for Supporting Ontario's Student Success Strategy: Reading and Writing with Youth*.)

Here is an example of mentoring using effective communication skills:

One day a student and I were working on a math problem, and I was talking through it step by step, asking every now and then to make sure he understood what I was saying. He had nodded to confirm that it all made sense. Towards the end of the lesson, something did not feel quite right to me, so I put him to the test and asked him to run me through the next example, explaining all the steps.

That is when a look of panic crossed his face and then he quickly burst out laughing. He admitted that I had lost him at the beginning and he was not able to follow but was too embarrassed to say anything. I told him I appreciated his honesty and assured him that it was not a problem to start from the beginning, and so we did. This time he took charge and was asking questions when things did not make sense! This example reminded me to stay in tune with the individual's behaviour and that body language can offer a lot of insight in what the person actually means (versus what they are saying).

If you have a good relationship with your students, you may find that they share their concerns with you. Often students want to discuss smaller problems such as an argument with a friend or a recent homework/test issue. Use active listening and problem-solving techniques to encourage students to develop their own solutions. If the problem is more complex, direct students to school/ organization counsellors who are properly trained to address these situations. (See page 11 for information about what to do if students tell you about abuse or other dangerous situations.)

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem means a good opinion of yourself. Self-esteem is crucial for teenagers to succeed in school and beyond. It helps them rebound from failures more easily. As well, self-esteem can help teenagers learn to take responsibility for their statements and their actions.

Like most of us, teenagers are often intimidated by others or feel they are not good enough in some way. As their bodies, relationships, goals and experiences change, teenagers constantly struggle with their self-esteem. Tutors can help teenagers improve their self-esteem. Although the focus of tutoring is completing homework, by being able to listen (and not judge), tutors give students the chance to feel secure, important and accepted. These elements are needed in their growth towards adulthood; they also help students improve their self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a combination of positive self-image, strong self-ideal and healthy self-concept over an extended period of time.

| Steps to Self-Esteem | Developed By |
|--|---|
| 1. Self-image – how you feel about yourself – how you see yourself | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successes and failures • Praise/acceptance or criticism/ rejection |
| 2. Self-ideal – who you want to be – your dreams, expectations and goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role models • Encouragement |
| 3. Self-concept – how you judge yourself – based on the possibility of achieving your goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether your self-image matches your self-ideal • Setting realistic and achievable goals |

(Harp, 2000, p. 3)

Each of these elements has implications for tutoring.

1. Self-image

- Praise students for their academic and personal successes each week (“I like how organized you are today”). Avoid negative remarks.
- Do not praise students too much. Ensure your comments are sincere and applicable.

- If you have to speak to students about their misbehaviour, do it quietly and away from others. This shows respect for students.
- When students misbehave, use natural and logical consequences. Refer to the rules of the homework club, which should be posted at each gathering.

2. Self-ideal

- As a tutor, you are a role model for students. You can provide students with a different perspective from that of other adults in their life, such as their parents or teachers.
- Encourage students. Teens who do not receive encouragement from their families are eager to receive it. Saying something like “I used to have trouble with writing essays too, but eventually I learned how to do it” can have an uplifting effect on a struggling teen.
- Be specific when you encourage teenagers.

3. Self-concept

- Encourage teenagers’ dreams. This can be a difficult one for tutors. For example, you may see a teen who dreams of being an astronaut but who cannot grasp simple multiplication. Although this may look like an impossible objective, do not tell the teen this. Remember that, as people get older, their goals change. As well, long-term goals can inspire and motivate people, and thus, should be encouraged.
- Help students set realistic short-term and long-term goals. A short-term goal could be memorizing the multiplication chart. Each success brings teens closer to their larger goal.

SAFETY

Because of your role as a tutor and mentor, students may tell you about abuse or other dangerous situations. As a volunteer – and indeed as a citizen – your role includes looking out for the safety of students.

If, in your honest judgment, you believe that a teen may not be safe, either because of the teen's behaviour or someone else's, you must report this to the Children's Aid Society. Speak with the teacher who is in charge of the program to help you do this. If a student tells you directly about an abusive situation, you will have to call the Children's Aid Society (see below for details).

If a student discloses an abusive situation to you:

- Listen without detailed questioning.
- When s/he is finished talking, tell her/him:
 - You have to tell someone else about what s/he said.
 - You will try to help her/him.
- Remember that you cannot counsel the student. Leave this job to trained professionals.
- Offer assurance to the student that you believe her/him.
- After the student has left, write down everything s/he has told you.
- Speak to the homework club supervisor.
- Contact the Children's Aid Society or Family and Children's Services in your area immediately. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They are very helpful and supportive, and will guide you through the process.
- If you cannot contact Children's Aid immediately, let the student go home, unless you believe the teen is in immediate danger.

A student may ask that you keep a secret. In this situation, it is best to say that you will keep the secret but if someone is hurting the student (or someone they know) you will have to get help. Be honest and upfront. The student can then decide whether or not to tell you, understanding that if the secret is more serious, you will take appropriate actions (reporting it to the homework club supervisor, contacting the Children's Aid Society, informing the principal if actions occur on school property, etc.).

For more information on your responsibilities under the Child and Family Services Act, visit:

www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/ChildProtection/Publications/repChAbuse.htm

In order to protect students, Frontier College screens all volunteers who tutor children and youth in its programs. Other things you can do to protect yourself and students:

- Meet with students only during the hours specified by your program.
- Always tutor students in an open area where others can see you.
- Do not exchange telephone numbers or email addresses with students.
- Avoid discussing topics (such as sex, drugs or risky behaviours) that might be misconstrued and might place you in a difficult situation

Q AND A: HOW TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES

Here are some tips for dealing with common challenges faced by volunteers working with teens. Some of these suggestions have been covered in other areas of this manual but are included here for easy reference.

Students tell you that their homework is too hard.

- Ask students to explain the homework to you.
- Look over the text and instructions and work through them with students (this teaches processing and problem-solving skills).
- Break the homework down into smaller, more manageable pieces.
- Gently encourage students to try to complete the work (“just 3 more questions, good job, try the next two ...”)
- Find a tutor who is familiar with the subject.
- Ask if another student in the same class might understand (peer help).
- Speak to the teacher.

Students ask questions you don’t know the answers to.

- Tell students that you don’t know the answers. Explain that you will find out the answers together (this will allow you to demonstrate research methods).
- Look in the textbook for answers.
- Check the library for a book on the subject.
- Look up the answers (together) on the internet.

Students blame you because they didn’t pass a test or do well on an assignment.

- Don’t dwell on the blame; students are likely frustrated and discouraged.
- Talk to students about the test or assignment and what they did to prepare for it. Offer suggestions for improvement for the next time. Give students a copy of the study strategies handouts (see Appendix B).
- Discuss the teacher’s comments and figure out the correct answers to the questions students got wrong.
- Ask when the next test or assignment is. Develop a strategy together so that students will be more prepared (see Appendix B).

Students are uncomfortable asking for help or are unmotivated.

- Encourage students to stay at the homework club to complete their schoolwork. Tell students that tutors are there just in case students need assistance.
- Give students space to work on their own. Check on students occasionally but don’t hang around unless you are invited or unless students look frustrated.

- Do something fun at each meeting to encourage return participation. This can be as simple as offering a small candy treat or holding a five-minute game of Bingo.
- Offer club-wide assistance with homework and study skills. At the end of each session, speak to the whole group for five minutes about how to be more successful at completing homework and studying for tests.

How can you be professional and a friend at the same time?

- Being professional means keeping your distance. Don't exchange phone numbers or email addresses with students. Keep your contact within the club.
- Being a friend and a tutor means listening but not judging.
- Get to know students' names, school likes/dislikes, strengths and challenges. Share similar things about yourself ("I'm not very good in math, but I really like reading".)
- If you get off track for too long, gently refocus students on homework.

Students are bringing up issues that are not related to homework. How can you get back to homework without seeming like you don't care?

- Use active listening. Are students just talking about small, personal issues so that they can avoid doing homework? If so, refocus their attention on homework. Explain that you are meeting with them to help with their academic challenges. Suggest that students work through personal issues on their own time.
- If the questions are about academic issues (high school classes, what university is like), set aside time to answer these. If several students have similar questions, consider offering a club-wide 5-10 minute discussion on these issues at the end of each session. Or arrange for a guest speaker to discuss these topics with students.
- Do students have a more complex problem? If so:
 - Tell students that you appreciate that they are talking to you and that you want to help them. Explain that you are not qualified to help them and that you will find someone who is.
 - Ask the homework club supervisor about the school's support systems. If possible, suggest that students speak to a counsellor or school social worker.
 - Reassure students that you will continue to be their tutor. (Students often think that if they talk to a counsellor, their tutor will abandon them)
 - If students are hesitant to speak to a counsellor, offer to go with them or ask if you can speak to the counsellor first. If students still do not want to talk to another adult, discuss the situation with the homework club supervisor to determine what, if anything, to do next.

- **IMPORTANT:** If the teen is being abused or is in danger, you must follow the “disclosure of abuse” procedure as outlined in this manual (see page 11).

Students have a very poor attitude toward the club, other students and the club leaders.

- Each club should have a set of rules posted at each session, with natural and logical consequences for students who do not follow the rules.
- Review the club rules with students. Emphasize respect for club leaders and other students. Explain the consequences of poor behaviour.
- Do not try to resolve the problem yourself. Behavioural issues are the responsibility of the homework club supervisor.
- Give warnings to students who misbehave. Be consistent. If the behaviours continue, follow through with consequences.
- The program should have increasingly serious consequences as the behaviours become more of a problem (loss of treat, speak with the homework club supervisor, give the student a ‘time out’, contact the student’s parents, ask the student to leave the program).

You can’t relate to the students’ likes/dislikes (due to generational, cultural or economical differences).

- Relating does not mean you have to have lived through everything students are experiencing. Try to find broad parallels. For example, even if your taste in music differs, both your parents and students’ parents may not appreciate your musical selections.

Your student has asked you out on a date (or is overly flirtatious)!

- For your own protection, **DO NOT** date a student you are tutoring. There is an unequal power dynamic between you and your student. Dating can lead to serious problems.
- Try to determine if the student is sincere. Perhaps this is a dare created by the student’s friends. If there are lots of people around, it is likely a joke designed to test you. However, if you are in a quiet corner where others cannot hear, the student may be serious.
- Let the student down gently (whether or not the student is joking). Tell the student that your role is to be a tutor. Tell the student that tutors are not allowed to meet students outside of the tutoring sessions.
- If the student is persistent, speak to the homework club supervisor. Ask to be placed with another student. The supervisor should talk to the student about the rules of the homework club and about respecting the tutors.

CONCLUSION

As a tutor, you play an important role in a teen's life. You motivate and inspire them to achieve academic success, and you help them to build their self-esteem and set goals. Remember to listen actively, be aware of their body language, be sensitive to cultural differences, and focus on their academic work. We hope you enjoy your tutoring experience, and we wish you the best of luck!

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Appendix A

Exercises for Tutor Training

EXERCISE 1: ACTIVE LISTENING / RESPONDING TO FEELINGS

<Please refer to Emotions Handout from Appendix B.>

| Student Says | Student Feels | Active Listening Response |
|--|---------------|---|
| "I really studied hard and I still failed chemistry." | "I'm stupid." | "You sound disappointed. Which parts did you find difficult?" |
| "I really hate school. I'm quitting as soon as I turn sixteen." | | |
| "My parents fight all the time. They don't even think about my brothers and me." | | |
| "Sally gets asked to every dance. What's she got?" | | |
| "There aren't any decent guys/girls in this school." | | |
| "My mother treats me like a baby. Nobody else has to be in by 11 pm." | | |
| "I'd like to try out for the team but I won't make it." | | |
| "I finally passed a math test." | | |

(Adapted from *Peer Helpers Plus* by Cheryl Brackenbury)

EXERCISE 2: NON-VERBAL CUES

Which emotions are conveyed by these gestures?

Remember to be aware of cultural differences!!

<Please refer to Emotions Handout from Appendix B.>

| Gestures | Emotion |
|---|---------|
| Folding arms across chest | |
| Wringing or clenching hands | |
| Standing with legs spread and hands on hips | |
| Crossing legs, kicking foot slightly | |
| Stroking chin | |
| Keeping hands in pockets, directing eyes to floor | |
| Covering mouth when speaking | |
| Raising eyebrows | |
| Winking | |
| Rubbing nose or pulling ear | |
| Staring sternly | |
| Averting eyes | |
| Constantly clearing throat | |

(Adapted from *Peer Helpers Plus* by Cheryl Brackenbury)

EXERCISE 3: OPEN QUESTIONS

Change these closed (yes/no/short-answer) questions to open questions.

| Closed Question | Open Question |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Did you like the dance? | What did you like about the dance? |
| Why aren't the dishes done? | |
| When are you going to do your assignment? | |
| Are you shy? | |
| Did you lose all your money? | |
| Why do you want the car? | |
| How could you forget your homework again? | |

(Adapted from *Peer Helpers Plus* by Cheryl Brackenbury)

EXERCISE 4: "I MESSAGES"

Turn these statements into "I messages".

1. You make me so mad when you are late! You're so inconsiderate!

I feel angry when you take so long to get ready because it makes me late.

2. You're so lazy! Your room looks like a pigsty – clothes and dishes everywhere.

3. You're so stupid! The other kids always laugh at us because of the dumb things you say.

4. You made us lose the game. You're such a klutz!

5. You never let me have the car. Don't you trust me?

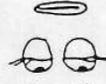
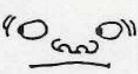
6. You dummy! You made us fail that assignment because you didn't hand it in on time.

(Adapted from *Peer Helpers Plus* by Cheryl Brackenbury)

Appendix B

Handouts

EMOTIONS

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|--|
|  aggressive |  alienated |  angry |  annoyed |  anxious |  apathetic |  bashful |
|  bored |  cautious |  confident |  confused |  curious |  depressed |  determined |
|  disappointed |  discouraged |  disgusted |  embarrassed |  enthusiastic |  envious |  ecstatic |
|  excited |  exhausted |  fearful |  frightened |  frustrated |  guilty |  happy |
|  helpless |  hopeful |  hostile |  humiliated |  hurt |  hysterical |  innocent |
|  interested |  jealous |  lonely |  loved |  lovestruck |  mischievous |  miserable |
|  negative |  optimistic |  pained |  paranoid |  peaceful |  proud |  puzzled |
|  regretful |  relieved |  sad |  satisfied |  shocked |  shy |  sorry |
|  stubborn |  sure |  surprised |  suspicious |  thoughtful |  undecided |  withdrawn |

(Wellness Reproductions Inc.)

CONVERSATION BLOCKERS

| Blocker | Examples | Hazards |
|----------------------|---|---|
| | | This blocker may make other people feel ... |
| Advice | “Why don’t you ...” “What I would do is ...” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to work through the problem themselves |
| Moralizing | “You should ...” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilty • Resentful |
| Ordering | “You have to ...” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry • Resentful |
| Warning | “You’d better ... or else ...” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry • Like doing the opposite |
| Argument | “Yes, but ...” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like giving counter-arguments • Inferior |
| Criticism | “You’re too ...” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defensive • Retaliatory • That they believe your judgements |
| False praise | “That was the best ... I’ve ever seen!” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That your comments are insincere • That they cannot live up to your expectations |
| Teasing | “What a ‘browner’!” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retaliatory • That avoiding the problem does not solve it |
| Analysis | “You’re acting this way because ...” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustrated • Afraid of further analysis |
| Sympathy | “I know just how you feel.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misunderstood |
| Changing the subject | “Let’s not talk about those sad things.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That their problems are not important |

(Adapted from *Peer Helpers Plus* by Cheryl Brackenbury)

YOUR STUDY HABITS – SELF-ASSESSMENT

How do you rate? For each of the following statements, circle the number that best describes your study habits.

| | Never | Some- times | Usual- ly | Alway- s |
|--|-------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1. My notebooks are neat and organized. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. I complete my assignments and hand them in on time. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. I listen carefully to directions from the teacher. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. If I do not understand something in class, I ask questions. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. I complete my homework before watching TV, talking on the phone, playing computer games, etc. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. I study and complete my homework in a quiet place at home. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. I go to class with all the required materials. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. I review my notes each week. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. I use a "homework book" or agenda each day to record upcoming assignments and tests. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. I use a computer and hand in typed assignments. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Please see over

Add up your score. Total score out of 30 is _____.

0 – 7: Talk to your tutor about ways to improve your study skills

8 – 15: You have started to develop some good study habits. Keep working on it!

16 – 23: Your study skills are good. Use this chart to think about ways you can improve.

24 – 30: Congratulations. Share your study strategies with your friends.

REMEMBER:

There is no overnight formula for getting better grades. However, with good preparation and planning, you can boost your marks significantly.

(Adapted from Ms. Ruth MacDonald, Elliot Lake Secondary School, Elliot Lake, Ontario)

STUDY STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Listen

- Concentrate on what is being said. Tune out other distractions
- Ask questions if something isn't clear to you
- Be alert to the feelings and style of the speaker
- Listen for the meanings and ideas beyond the words

Take Notes

- Jot down only the important facts and ideas
- Use your own words, rather than the teacher's words
- Keep notes organized. Put the date and a number on each page
- Include all handouts. Label graphs and diagrams
- Learn to use note-taking techniques such as outlining and mapping
- Leave a margin for inserting key words or ideas while reviewing
- Keep up with notes each day. If you are absent, find out what you missed.

Remember

- At the end of each day and each week, review what you have learned in each subject
- Summarize a chapter from a textbook, the contents of a lecture, or points of a discussion
- Apply what you have learned as soon and as often as possible
- Focus on the key points

Choose the Right Place

- Do your homework in the same place every day
- Ensure your work space is well lit and uncluttered
- Keep reference materials and stationery supplies on hand
- Sit in a chair while doing your homework. Don't lie on your bed or the floor
- Avoid distractions such as the television or radio

Get Organized

- Write down due dates for projects on a monthly calendar
- Every day, record homework and assignments in a pocket- sized notebook

Go Beyond

- Homework is an extension of the work you do at school. The purpose of homework is to reinforce what you are learning. Do your homework every day after school
- When you are interested in a particular topic, find out more about it at home. Read a book, watch a video or look it up on the internet.

(Adapted from Ms. Ruth MacDonald, Elliot Lake Secondary School, Elliot Lake, Ontario)

TEST/EXAM STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Be Prepared

- Find out what kind of test you are getting ready for (essay, short-answer, multiple-choice).
- Try to determine what will be on the test. Listen for the teacher's tips. Spend more time studying the most likely topics. But never assume something won't be included unless the teacher says so specifically.
- Review. Skim each lesson quickly. Read textbook chapters again. Get an overview, and then tackle details. Use glossaries, indexes, footnotes, maps, diagrams, etc.
- Memorize essential facts and formulas.
- Test yourself. Write summaries in outline form; prepare lists; recite material aloud without referring to notes; tell someone what you have learned. Prepare sample questions and answer them without consulting your notes. Test your knowledge with flash cards.

Plan and Schedule

- Avoid cramming. Complete your review early so you'll have time to get any questions answered before the exam.
- Write out a copy of your exam schedule with the date, time and place of each exam.
- Set a target mark for each course. Estimate the study time needed to reach your goals.
- Set up a study schedule (including breaks!) to ensure that you cover the required material.
- Relax before the test, to alleviate stress.
- Wear comfortable clothes during the test. This will help you to concentrate better.
- Take all the equipment you will need to your test: ruler, calculator, pens, etc.

Timing

- Look at how much each question is worth. Estimate how much time you should spend on each question based on its value.
- Don't rush through questions in a panic. Pace yourself according to how much time you have allotted to each question.
- Answer the easiest questions first. Make a mark beside questions you find more difficult and return to them later. Sometimes tests contain hints that may help you remember the answers.
- Leave yourself enough time at the end of the test to reread what you've written, to correct spelling and grammar and to check diagrams you've drawn.
- Stay focussed during the exam.

Write On!

- First, skim the whole test and read all the directions. Make sure you have all the pages.
- Read the questions several times to make sure you've understood them.
- For multiple-choice questions:
 - Try to form the answer in your mind before looking at the choices given.
 - Don't change your answer unless you're absolutely positive it is wrong.
 - Don't guess at the answers (unless there is no penalty for guessing).

- Unless the question asks for another format, write your answers in paragraphs. Remember to:
 - Make an outline of the main points you want to include.
 - Begin with a thesis statement that includes the key words of the question.
 - Support the thesis with specific examples and detailed information.
 - Conclude by very briefly summing up your answer.
- Use the word *because* in your answer. It will force you to explain your thinking.
- If you are asked to explain your reasoning or to describe a process, use words, numbers, graphs, diagrams, symbols, charts and/or pictures.
- Underline key words such as *discuss, compare, explain, contrast, list, describe* and *outline*. (See box below for an explanation of these words.) Make sure your answer fits the question that is being asked.
- Number your answers exactly as they appear on the exam paper. Don't change 2 to II or ii.
- Be sure your answers are clear, well organized and complete. Do not make the teacher "guess" what your answers are.
- Do not leave any spaces/questions blank. Blank spaces frustrate and surprise teachers. A partial answer is better than no answer.

After the Exam

- Go over this list again and identify how you could have prepared for the test or exam more effectively.

Key Words

Compare: Explain what is the same and what is different about two or more things.

Describe: Explain something in a step-by-step manner. Use words, numbers, graphs, diagrams, symbols, charts and/or pictures.

Explain: Use words (or symbols) to make your solution clear and understandable.

Give reasons: Explain your reasoning in your own words. Give evidence that your answer is correct.

List: Write down in point form.

Show your work: Record all calculations. Include all the steps you went through to get your answer. Use words, numbers, graphs, charts and pictures.

(Adapted from Ms. Ruth MacDonald, Elliot Lake Secondary School, Elliot Lake, Ontario)

TESTIMONIAL

I have been involved with Frontier College through a partnership with Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO), Frontier College and Hamilton Public Libraries. Since 2004, I have been actively involved with the Homework Help Club at the Central library. The program was designed to help newcomer youth with homework in a friendly environment conducive to social networking and friendship building.

My experience with the club has been very rewarding and the professionalism Frontier College brought in by training, supervising and supporting volunteer tutors is amazing. This guide for tutors working with teens is a step in the right direction. Making a good program even better and equipping tutors with real tools is a smart move. I have personally seen youth attending the homework club develop confidence, learn new techniques for tackling their homework and received very encouraging positive verbal feedback from parents and teachers. The feedback has born testimony that children who attend the homework clubs improve in their studies

I congratulate Frontier College for their commitment to helping teens and especially making the transition for new Canadians to our schooling system easier through Homework Help Clubs

Loyd Kibaara
Youth Program Coordinator
Settlement & Integration Services Organization (SISO)
Hamilton Ontario
May 17, 2006