



The Organization for Psychoeducational Tutoring, Inc.

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What is psychoeducational tutoring?

What we mean by this phrase is strategies of improving mental health by straightforward educational methods: instruction, modeling, practice exercises, reinforcement and feedback, moving along a hierarchy of difficulty in tasks. These methods are used to teach children the skills that are the antitheses of common psychological problems.

We see psychoeducation as a method of improving global psychosocial functioning of people, distinct from counseling, psychotherapy, and certainly distinct from drug therapy. These other approaches are often very useful; psychoeducation provides another option that is not mutually exclusive with the others.

Our brand of tutoring involves one-to-one half-hour sessions between tutor and student, taking place close to *every day*.

How can sessions be so frequent?

The sessions are held by telephone. This strategy was arrived at after Joseph Strayhorn, a child psychiatrist, conducted several interventions in schools and clinics, and wanted to see how many children could tolerate working directly with a tutor over the phone. A gratifyingly large fraction of the children who have tried this have taken to it well. We find that very positive and strong relationships can develop without tutors and children ever getting together face to face. For some children the lack of visual input even appears to be a big advantage: the child is not distracted from the manual the child is focusing on.

What skills are taught in psychoeducational tutoring? What do you mean by the “skills that are the antitheses of common psychological problems?”

The skill of productivity is the antithesis of the work aversion that often contributes to school failure. Joyousness skills are the antithesis of depression. Kindness, honesty, respectful talk, nonviolence, and compliance skills oppose conduct problems. Fortitude skills oppose tantrums, emotional dysregulation, and anger control issues. Good decision-making skills, self-discipline, concentration, and relaxation skills help oppose ADHD. Friendship-building and social skills reduce autistic spectrum problems. Courage skills are the opposite of anxiety issues.

But these skills are not meant only to prevent or remedy such problems! They also help life to be happier and better, even for people who would never be diagnosed. They promote what we define as mental health: the ability to be happy and help others to be happy.

Do you teach academic skills as well?

The program started out as a reading tutoring program, and it was very successful at this. When a child has both reading psychological skills goals, we have a double chance to do good by helping the child learn to read about psychological skills. We are very proud of the reading gains that many of our struggling readers have achieved.

Who are the tutors? Are they licensed?

Most are college students. They are not licensed, nor are they doing work that requires licensure. They do “alternate reading” of manuals written by Joseph Strayhorn (some in collaboration with Jillian Strayhorn) that are constructed to directly teach the student psychological skills. They do “exercises” which practice certain skillful patterns. And they chat with the student, not to counsel or solve the child's problems, but just to have a good time in social conversation.

How much does this service cost?

For 6 days a week, the cost is \$200 per month. 5 days a week is \$190, 4 is \$180, and 3 is \$170. We don't provide tutoring fewer than 3 days a week.

Is there scholarship money available?

We are offering the service currently at reduced fees for some students. But the number to which we can offer this at present is quite limited.

Who are the candidates for receiving psychoeducational tutoring?

The main criterion is that the family sees the value in this and has a regular enough schedule that the child can be reached by phone regularly. Another important criterion is that the child would enjoy working with an older person and would not overly resent the intrusion upon other activities. Both of these are sometimes difficult to predict; a two-week trial spin is often the best way to find out. Almost all students are uncertain at the beginning whether this for them, which is completely expected.

We have worked very successfully with children who need help in reading and/or in some sort of psychological, emotional, or behavioral issue. We have worked successfully with some children on math skills.

It appears to us that a much higher fraction of children enjoy the tutoring when they are in the elementary school years. However, we have done some successful work with middle school and high school students.

A child who “doesn't like to talk on the phone” may still be an excellent candidate for telephone tutoring! Many of our children find social conversation difficult at first; fortunately, the alternate reading or reading instructional activities do not require conversation skills. These can develop gradually.

What's a brief history of OPT?

Joseph Strayhorn experimented with psychoeducation and tutoring interventions in the late 1970's through the 1990's. In 1999 he began experimenting with telephone tutoring. From 1999 to 2014, phone tutoring was a subsidiary of his private practice of child psychiatry. From 2001 to present, more manuals have been added to the armamentarium. In 2003, Jillian Strayhorn became a phone tutor, and has done this ever since. In about 2009 Jillian began training other tutors as well. In 2014 Jillian graduated from Cornell (summa cum laude in psychology) and began working full time for the tutoring organization; in 2014 OPT became a nonprofit corporation in New York.

How can one find out more?

Check our web site, www.psychoeducationaltutoring.com, or email or call Jillian.

