

TUTOR VS. ACADEMIC COACH

# A Parent's Guide to Choosing the Right Support

PRESENTED BY SAOTG 



Knowing how to help your student when he or she struggles in school is one of the most difficult challenges a parent can face. Some students are brilliant and simply underperform relative to their academic potential. Some students struggle to build the necessary compensatory skills for strongly suspected or diagnosed learning differences. Some students are just not in the right environment to thrive based on how they learn. Regardless, identifying the right support to help your child achieve academic success is critical.

Unfortunately, the process can leave you feeling exhausted, frustrated, and maybe even hopeless.

Tired, frustrated, and hopeless parents trying to help their tired, frustrated, and hopeless student sounds like a recipe for disaster. If you've decided to call in an academic support professional, you're taking the best next step in getting your student (and your family) back on the road to success.

Tutors and academic coaches are two of the most common types of after-school support professionals who families engage to help struggling students. Both play a vital role in helping students achieve success, but their respective approach to helping students is quite different. It is important to understand the differences in order to choose the best approach for your child. That's why we've created the Parent's Guide to Choosing the Right Support.



# A QUICK Questionnaire



Before we get into the details, here is a quick questionnaire to help get you started.

## How do you know if your child could benefit from a tutor?

- a** Does your student struggle primarily in one subject area?
- b** Does the student struggle primarily with a specific skill (e.g., memorizing math facts, balancing chemical reactions, diagramming sentences)?
- c** Is your student working to improve a score on a specific exam (e.g., SAT/ACT, ISEE, AP Test, mid-term/final)?
- d** Is your student able to easily locate needed materials, get started with work, meet deadlines, and sustain effort in all subject areas?



If you answered yes to these questions, it sounds like a tutor could be the perfect solution for your student and your family.

## How do you know if your child could benefit from an academic coach?

- a Does your student struggle across many subject areas?
- b Does your student struggle with general school skills (e.g., planning, organizing, studying, note-taking, test-taking, self-advocating)?
- c Does your student procrastinate, lose focus easily, or have trouble starting schoolwork?
- d Does your student struggle to follow directions or prevent silly mistakes?



If you answered yes to several of these questions, it sounds like an academic coach could be the perfect solution for your student and your family. In fact, many academic coaches can also do some traditional tutoring as well.

But before you make your decision, let's dive a little deeper. Since we are being straightforward about the selection process, let's take a no-nonsense look at the pros and cons of each type of professional.



# Tutors

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**Quick Description:** Tutoring is about helping students master a particular subject or score within a certain range on a specific exam. Tutors help students gain confidence in their understanding of a particular subject matter or in their mastery of a particular section of a standardized exam.



## Pros:

- ④ Tutors are often professionals who have targeted knowledge in a specific subject area.
- ④ Tutors are great at helping students get over a short-term hurdle like mastering Spanish conjugations, digesting Shakespeare, or calculating concentrations of solutions for an exam.
- ④ Tutoring can be 1:1 with a high degree of customized learning or in groups to be more cost-effective.
- ④ Tutors can help students improve their score on standardized exams to gain admission to a school of choice.

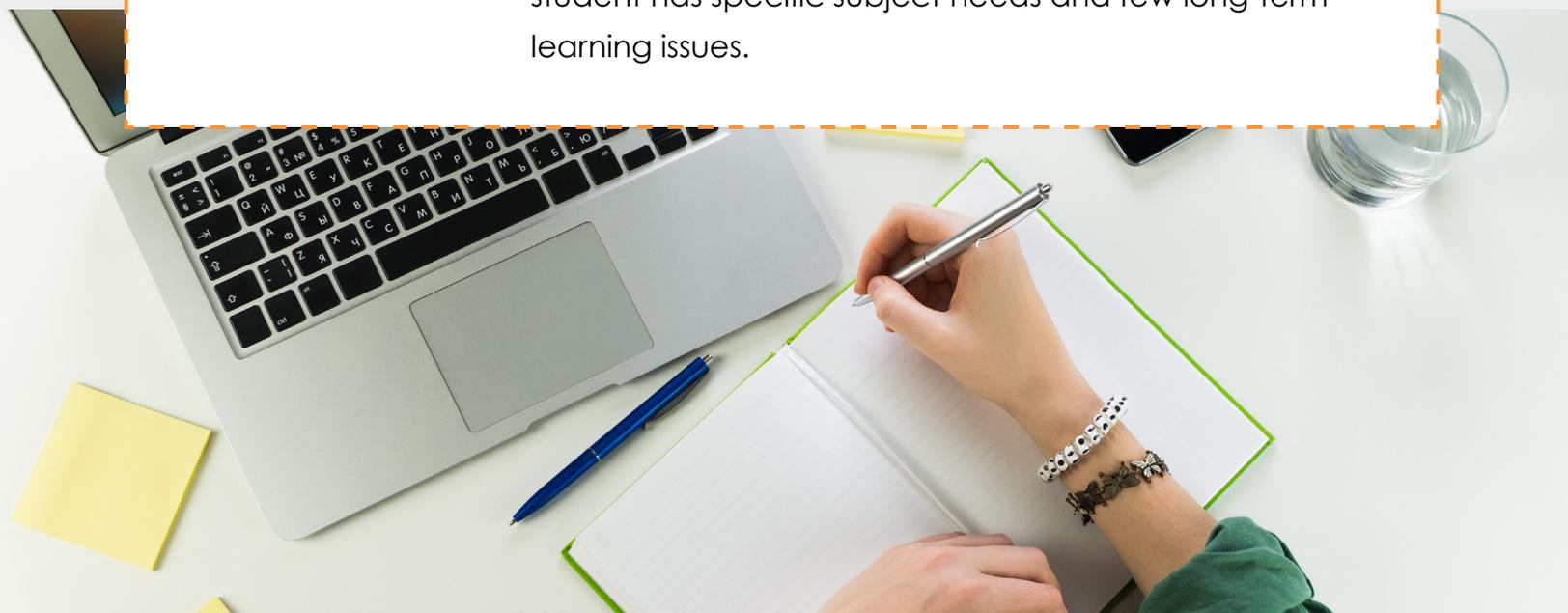


## Cons:

- ④ If students struggle in multiple subjects, you may end up engaging multiple tutors to ensure sufficient proficiency across many topics.
- ④ Many tutors are college undergraduate students just working to make extra money while still in school, so their availability will vary with school semesters.
- ④ Tutors generally do not have the experience or training to adapt teaching methods to different learning styles.
- ④ Tutors often have little experience working with students who have strongly suspected or diagnosed learning differences.
- ④ Tutors can often be a Band-Aid solution, solving a problem for one class, but not helping with long-term academic success.

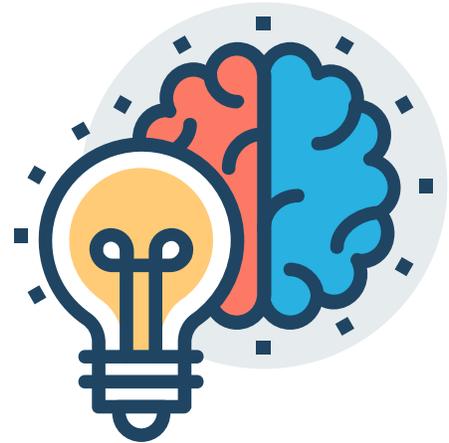
### Bottom Line:

Engaging a tutor is a great decision, when the student has specific subject needs and few long-term learning issues.



# Academic Coaches

**Quick Description:** Academic coaching involves teaching students skills and strategies that apply to all classes; these skills will benefit students far beyond their academic years. The emphasis of an academic coach is helping students become more confident and independent learners, no matter the subject they are tackling.



## Pros:

- ④ Academic coaches are experts in the process of learning rather than in one specific subject area.
- ④ Academic coaches work with students to develop their executive functioning skills, so they learn the systems to adapt, problem-solve, self-manage, self-regulate, and self-advocate.
- ④ Academic coaches don't just address one particular subject, but rather they target the root of what may be causing a student to struggle in the first place (e.g., mismanaging time, procrastination, disorganization).
- ④ Academic coaches teach students reading, note-taking, and study skills they can use to improve their performance on any exam.

- ④ Academic coaching can be 1:1 with a high degree of customized learning or in groups to be more cost-effective.
- ④ Many academic coaches can also incorporate traditional tutoring, as needed.
- ④ Academic coaches can continue to mentor students as they transition into college and into their professional careers.



## Cons:

- ④ Academic coaches are not generally experts in one specific subject area, which means they may not be equipped to tutor high-level college or graduate school subjects.
- ④ Academic coaches may not be the best fit for helping students with advanced standardized exams (e.g., MCAT, LSAT, GMAT).
- ④ Many tutors mistakenly use the title of academic coach so be sure you engage an academic coach who delivers a proven methodology to help with executive functioning skills.



# WHAT ARE Executive Functioning skills?

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Executive functioning skills provide critical supports for learning and development. They are the basis for everything we do, and they are essential to succeeding in school and beyond.



According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, executive functioning skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. Just as an air traffic control system at a busy airport safely manages the arrivals and departures of many aircrafts on multiple runways, the brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses.

As adults, most parents take these skills for granted and don't associate them with why their child might be struggling in school.



## DO THESE sound familiar?

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- ④ What do you mean you forgot your homework?
- ④ How can you forget to write down the assignment?
- ④ Why is it so hard to just move to the next task on your list? I shouldn't have to stand over you to get this finished.
- ④ You just aren't trying.
- ④ That's just lazy.
- ④ You are so smart. Just do it!
- ④ What happened? We studied for that test together!

Very often, students who struggle with executive functioning skills feel embarrassed because they can't seem to accomplish the most basic of academic tasks, like turning in assignments or writing things down in a planner.

Understanding how executive functioning skills develop is an important part of helping students grow, and it is the foundation for helping students feel confident and capable in school and in life.

# SAOTG

At Staying Ahead of the Game, our large team of expert academic coaches can tutor students in specific subject areas, but more importantly they focus on determining the root causes of students' academic struggles.

You downloaded this guide because you are ready to do everything it takes to help your student succeed. Let us help you and your student by doing what we do best: helping students become accomplished and confident learners!

[GET STARTED](#)

