How can I help my son or daughter get the most out of the tutoring sessions?

The best thing they can do is go over their homework beforehand, do the problems that they can, and mark the problems that they get stuck on. Just by doing that, they will be getting about two or three times more out of the tutoring session than a student who begins the session without preparation.

What can I do as a parent to help the process?

The single most important thing that a parent can do is refrain from trying to force their child into having the tutoring sessions.

But what if there is no other way to prevent my child from failing the class?

If it comes down to having to try to force the child into tutoring, the child just might squeak by and pass the class, but the experience will have most likely done more harm than good. The child will probably end up having even less interest in math in the future and will make future career choices accordingly.

What can a parent do with a child who is headed towards failing his math class, but doesn't want any help?

This child, like most young people, is having trouble making the connection between his present studies and his future life as an adult. The best advice I can give is to try using "the carrot" instead of "the stick." Try to figure out what kind of reward will motivate him or her to want to do better.

Why is math so difficult for some people to learn?

One reason is that our brains don't seem to be able to think mathematically in the same easy and free flowing manner as when we think about normal everyday topics. Most mathematicians have to write down all their mathematical ideas as they are thinking them. And then they have to very carefully analyze everything they wrote down, almost as if they were looking at the inner-workings of their own brain. Compared to normal, everyday thinking, it would be as if everything we ever thought (such as what we are going to do today, or remembering a funny story) had to be written down in the form of diagrammed sentences and the diagram had to be exactly right before it made any sense.

Isn't there an easy way to learn math?

There are ways to make math fun, but sometimes fun things require hard work. Consider the hobbyist who likes to build model railroad settings, with bridges and houses and roads with cars, etc. That requires a lot of planning and a lot of work, but it's a labor of love. It's the same with math. There's no way you can just put your math book under your pillow and expect the knowledge to filter up into your brain overnight.

How can we motivate kids, so that they'll be willing to work hard at learning math?

Here we run into a very big problem. There's a lot of fun stuff out there for the younger kids learning basic addition or multiplication, but when the kids get a little older, around sixth or seventh grade, it becomes more difficult to find fun materials to use. This is where one-on-one attention can help, since an experienced math teacher/tutor can learn about the child's interests and find interesting ways to explain how math can be involved in pursuing those interests. The best math teachers are those who can teach the child or teen in the present as well as lay important groundwork for the child's future pursuits as a college student and adult. Sometimes such "side conversations" are actually the most important part of a tutoring session.