

1) Realize that although completing homework or studying for a test may be on the agenda, he may not be able to focus on schoolwork right away. It may be necessary to spend a few minutes talking to him in order to guide him from the distracting thoughts in his head to taking action and participating in learning (usually upbeat and humorous things help him snap out of his distracting thoughts, assuming there isn't an underlying emotional component which can't be overcome during the tutoring session). Quickly gauge his level of interest in learning/doing work for the session. If you find you can't capture his focus after a few minutes, then it helps to explain honestly that although you enjoy talking to him about non-school stuff, you specifically came here to help him succeed in school, and you hope he respects your time and effort, because you greatly appreciate the fact he's allowing you to be part of his success in school, which is really exciting, simply because you know he is willing to try. (I'm not an expert at talking to children, but being genuine seems to work).

2) He will learn at his own pace, and since learning is the goal, teaching him at his pace is crucial. There are two levels of learning in school - LEVEL ONE: Learning how to complete assignments and pass tests, which can include a range of techniques, from independent problem solving and memorization to reliance on others and reference materials for answers. LEVEL TWO - Learning how to more efficiently grasp concepts and make connections (ie. productive thinking which applies outside of school as well). The pace at which LEVEL ONE occurs is directly related to how much success he has with conquering LEVEL TWO. The more he can think productively in his life, the more he will feel comfortable solving problems and learning new concepts in school, without being spoon-fed the answers. It is important to recognize his pace and help him become more savvy at LEVEL TWO by feeding him subtle hints and explanations in reference to LEVEL ONE - rather than simply solving schoolwork assignments for him in order to complete his homework.

3) So what exactly is the purpose of a tutor? It's not to be a homework answer-giver. It's more important to challenge him than to quickly offer an answer just so the work gets completed. When is it too quickly to offer an exact answer? Always. Your purpose is to enhance a student's abilities to learn. So dishing up an exact answer to him, because you think he's taking too long to figure it out, is not teaching him to think for himself. If particular things seem beyond his current abilities, then so be it. If it were simple for him to grasp things, then he wouldn't need a tutor, would he? It's important to emphasize that it's ok to struggle with new things, and it's ok to think hard and not solve something right away. A tutor is a guide towards a schoolwork answer. Push him to think before you offer answers. Once he has the confidence that his brain can handle all this thinking, eventually he'll WANT to try to solve things on his own.

4) If you tend to look at the clock and worry that time is passing too quickly, you will also tend to believe you need to complete the homework assignment within the time limit. Focus instead on helping his brain make connections. Each time you force him to think, he'll become more adept at getting answers on his own. Hint, but don't divulge the exact answers. If he doesn't complete the assignment, let him know how proud you are that he tried so hard to solve things on his own. And tell him the more he focuses, the more quickly the answers will come to him. Whether it takes him 2 or 5 more sessions to finally complete an assignment successfully, he will have gained an invaluable skill. What does he gain by completing homework assignments you gave him the answers to? A good mark for completing homework, but little chance of improving his test scores.

5) The goal is to empower him with confidence that he can use his brain to think productively and he WILL solve things on his own eventually. Anyone can. Believe it. And the art of teaching students to enjoy thinking is probably one of the most challenging and rewarding things an adult can offer. Use your personal experiences, struggles, successes, insights, creativity and personality to challenge your student to think. You'll be surprised how much a seemingly "below-average" student who "hates math" can succeed if he is instilled with confidence. It's not to say that anyone can learn rocket science and grasp its concepts without struggling, but core classes like English, Spanish (or other language), Algebra, Biology, History, Chemistry, etc... these can ALL be taught to anyone with a desire to learn.

6) Approach scholastic learning from as many different angles as you need to. Be transparent in your approach. He may not grasp one explanation of a concept, but a second or third explanation may be on the money. If you want him to become an avid thinker, then lead by example and be transparent in your assessment of your teaching ability. Show him how you come up with creative ways to teach him new ideas, and let him know that even YOU struggle to come up with effective explanations sometimes, because everyone learns differently. Explain that if he focuses on what you're saying while thinking about it productively, and you focus on coming up with effective ways to explain things, you'll both be unstoppable. It's the communication between you two that enhances your ability to teach effectively.

7) Be authentic and realize that although you may understand a concept completely, it can be a challenge to teach him that concept, simply because understanding and teaching are two separate skills. So it's your job to constantly improve your teaching abilities. And share that fact with him. Be authentic with him, and make mental notes of what types of phrases, words, and concepts he responds to positively. He will see right through half-sincere niceties if you're actually frustrated, and he will be more apt to connect with you if you explain to him your frustration at those times when you're at a loss to adequately explain something - ie. you're thinking hard and not coming up with an effective explanation easily. If he sees that even successful people struggle, and you're willing to be honest about it, then he will be more apt to put in more effort.