

Building the “WHY” for Tutoring & Small-Group Engagement



Students are more likely to engage in tutoring when they understand why it matters for them. Tutors play a key role in helping students see tutoring and small-group work as **supportive, purposeful, and connected to their goals**—not as punishment or extra work.

Students engage when tutoring feels purposeful, supportive, and respectful.

Helping students understand the “why” increases motivation, effort, and confidence. Tutors do not need to convince students—they help students see the value through encouragement, clarity, and small wins.

When to use these strategies:

Use the strategies on this page when students seem disengaged, hesitant, resistant, or unsure why tutoring matters. If students are hesitant, start with encouragement and a small, achievable task to build momentum.

Use these phrases when students are hesitant, disengaged, or resistant.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1

Frame tutoring as a chance to get extra help and feel successful.

“This is our time to practice and get better together.”

2

Celebrate small wins to build confidence.

“You didn’t know that before—now you do.”

3

Connect learning to interests, games, or real-world examples.

“This is like leveling up in a game—you practice to get stronger.”

4

Emphasize growth rather than perfection.

“Mistakes help our brains grow.”

5

Use encouraging language that highlights effort.

“I can tell you’re really trying—that matters.”



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MIDDLE SCHOOL

1 Help students see tutoring as a tool, not a punishment.

“This is here to help you—not to get you in trouble.”

2 Connect skills to upcoming tests, projects, or goals.

“This will make the quiz on Friday easier.”

3 Acknowledge frustration and normalize asking for help.

“A lot of students feel stuck here—it’s okay to ask.”

4 Show how participation helps the whole group.

“When everyone focuses, we finish faster.”

5 Set short-term, achievable goals together.

“Let’s aim to finish just these two problems first.”

HIGH SCHOOL

1 Tie tutoring to graduation, credits, or postsecondary goals.

“This helps you stay on track for graduation.”

2 Emphasize independence and skill-building.

“The goal is for you to be able to do this on your own.”

3 Connect content to real-world applications or careers.

“This skill shows up in a lot of jobs.”

4 Respect students’ time and autonomy.

“Let’s make the most of the time we have.”

5 Reinforce how tutoring supports long-term success.

“This is about building skills you’ll use later.”