

# 1

## Attitudes, Anxieties, and Expectations

Fear and anxiety are natural emotions we often feel in our daily encounters and interactions with others. New situations such as tutoring, where people start out as strangers, frequently heighten these feelings. Tutoring is not just any new situation, however; the great challenges, expectations, and social complications it brings compound normal fears and anxieties. When recounting their first days in the classroom, even veteran educators report feelings similar to those experienced by the following new tutor:

I was extremely nervous, since I was not very sure if the kids would like me. I felt a great deal of pressure, since I had never tutored in my life. I thought I could not offer the children anything, because I was questioning my abilities to teach. In addition, would the teacher like me? Would I get along with her? Then, scared and intimidated by the size and the beauty of the school, I did not know if I should turn back and run, or walk into the supervisor's office with confidence and integrity.

Even if such anxious feelings subside after the first day, as the setting becomes somewhat familiar and the tutor-tutee relationship

gets underway, new fears arise throughout the tutoring experience. Fear, anxiety, and insecurity are intrinsic to tutoring. Intricate situations and emotionally taxing incidents can make tutors feel not only helpless, but even a threat to the educational progress of their tutees. As complicated and discouraging as such feelings may be, your knowledge and application of certain governing attitudes and practices will equip you with some basic methods of dealing with both first-day and ongoing problems and concerns.

Because many tutors share the same *fears and anxieties*, we have found a set of general *attitudes and practices* that, when brought into the tutoring scenario, can ease these concerns. The most common fears that new tutors express surface in such questions as Will my student like me? Will I like my new student? Will I be able to fit in and relate to a student who is very different from me (in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status)? Will I be able to teach everything that there is to be taught? Will I succeed as a tutor?

Such questions are not only common, they are reasonable for anyone entering a new or unfamiliar tutoring situation. But they need not be paralyzing. In spite of your fears and anxieties, rewarding experiences will emerge once you have made a connection with your tutee. When your tutees realize that you tutor because you care and that you are genuinely interested in them and in having a strong tutor-tutee bond, tutoring becomes an experience filled with moments of pleasure, satisfaction, and joy, and your fears and anxieties recede. Tutors often come out of their tutoring relationships with a much deeper sense of satisfaction than they had expected. Reactions often include such sentiments as "I got so much more than I offered," "He'll never know how much he affected me," and "I found this experience to be the most important thing I've ever done."

We have found that most successful tutoring partnerships spring from a common underlying concept: *unconditional acceptance*. Unconditional acceptance is the basis for the set of attitudes and practices we discuss throughout this chapter. It is also the most basic and essential foundation for a strong, successful tutoring relationship.

One of the best ways to overcome or at least dilute your fears and anxieties is to try to ground yourself in unconditional acceptance as you enter your tutoring scenario. The first step in doing this is to adopt a certain set of *attitudes* before entering and while engaging in the tutoring situation. These attitudes can both ease tutors' fears and shape tutors into better and more open teachers. The essential attitudes for tutoring, all flowing from unconditional acceptance, involve *giving up expectations, displaying enthusiasm and interest, and feeling empathy*.

These components not only help develop a suitable and successful tutoring mindset, but they lay the foundation for a number of effective tutoring *practices*. We have found three general practices very useful in creating a comfortable and successful tutoring relationship: *being patient, being observant and asking questions, and understanding students on their own level*.

## Normal Fears and Anxieties

The good news is that most tutors overcome their initial fears and anxieties about tutoring. Knowing what to expect, and knowing that most of your fellow tutors have felt the same concerns, may alleviate your anxieties. Tutoring is not easy; it will constantly confront you with your own weaknesses and failings. This can be difficult for anyone. For one who has just committed to helping others, it can be devastating. But because *almost every tutor* experiences these feelings, almost every successful tutor has had to overcome them.

### *Will the Students Like Me?*

Many new tutors are concerned with whether or not their assigned student will like them. Will the tutee accept them as a friend and a role model? As a white female tutor reflects on her experience, she expresses a general concern of many tutors: "Although I do like children, I do not know that I am very approachable, for some reason. Maybe it is because I do not have much contact with children in my daily activities, I suppose I am not quite used to being around them nor know how to treat them or at least do not have much experience in doing so."

Like this tutor, many worry that they will not be compatible either with children in general or with their specifically assigned tutee. Besides worrying about how kids will react to their personalities, tutors also worry about how tutees will see them, what first impressions they may have. Tutors are often afraid that they will not look like the type of person the tutee will want to work with.

Most tutors wake up on the morning of their first day of tutoring anxious over what to wear, how to comb their hair, and how they look overall. One male tutor writes, "Maybe I would be looked up to as a big brother, or maybe because of my six-foot three-inch stature they would be afraid of me."

### *Will I Like My Students?*

Tangential to the previous concern is whether or not you will like the students to whom you have been assigned. What if a child is obnoxious or completely unmotivated? What if a tutee doesn't want to be there or deliberately asks things that you can't answer and makes tutoring difficult for you?

Whenever you are assigned to spend a lot of time with someone whom you don't know, it's natural to wonder if you'll get along. And obviously, if you've been assigned to help them, it's normal to wonder if you'll really want to once you get to know them.