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### **Peer Tutoring Helps with New Skills**

Cooking is not a specialty for me. I enjoy food, love to eat out, and appreciate fine cuisine. But, putting it together at home is not something I go out of my way to perfect. So, what would I do if I wanted to learn to cook?

Learning something new can be quite daunting. Even when the desire is there, the idea of taking on a new skill when you aren't quite sure you're capable of learning it or of ever creating anything of value is quite overwhelming! In addition, there seem to be so many ways of acquiring new skills; you can take classes, go to workshops, hire a coach, and/or read books.

Now, translate your feelings about learning this new skill to a child who is struggling to learn something new—perhaps it's reading or learning to multiply. We often assume that children simply learn new skills easily and naturally as they mature. Some do. Maybe you did as a child. Most of us, however, run into areas where we just don't get it. Learning when to use apostrophes was a problem for me. (It was truly a challenge for me to learn the difference between 's and s').

If I were in school today, I might get help regarding the use of apostrophes from a peer tutor. A peer tutor is a child who is the same age, or just a bit older who already understands the skill with which I'm struggling and can help me learn it. Peer tutoring is

often easier for the learner to accept because the tutor isn't the "expert" or the "teacher." He/she is just someone who has a skill the learner doesn't quite yet have yet. In my example, it might have been a seventh grader teaching me, as a sixth grader, how to write a sentence like: "This is my brother's parakeet."

In El Dorado County, a number of schools provide a peer tutoring option for students. One great example takes place at Gold Oak School. Years ago a fifth grade class and our county run program for multiply handicapped students teamed up for the purpose of peer tutoring. According to Superintendent Dick Williams, the program continues today, and has even expanded under the guidance of special education teacher, Bev Baker. Not only do the fifth graders from April Hood's and Sarah Marshall-Gillihan's classes work daily with Bev's students, but this year they put on their first Winter Program. With their peer assistants, Bev's students sang songs, rang jingle-bells and held the first assembly the special needs children had ever conducted. According to Williams, this was as big as a Presidential press conference including videos, cameras, and photos. The expression on the faces of the parents, from both groups, was enough to know this peer-tutoring is a huge success for everyone.

Yes, I could certainly take cooking classes or read fourteen books on how to make gourmet meals. Or, like the students in our peer-tutoring programs, I might talk with my friend Sally who loves to cook and ask her to give me some tips on preparing chicken. The apostrophes can wait. I'd really rather try out Sally's new recipe!