

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO DO

By Hanna Duff

"But I *really* have nothing to do!"

If you know that a new episode of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* comes on in five minutes, you might be skeptical about this statement. If your student compulsively writes "Tyler" all over her notebook and frequently stares into space, you might also have some serious doubts. However, there will be those rare occasions when your student really *won't* have work to do. Instead of going home to the leftover pizza waiting for you in the fridge, here are some tips to fill the hour and make it count.

Together, peruse your student's agenda for any upcoming tests or quizzes. Simply opening the agenda may even reveal homework assignments or make-up work that your student forgot to complete. Whether you find a Friday morning square root quiz or an untouched take-home test due tomorrow, you can be certain that something of significance lurks in the not-so-distant future for your student.

A slow night can be a good opportunity for you to introduce your student to effective new study methods. If your student has to memorize Revolutionary War facts or the periodic table, use the hour to make flashcards and play memory games together. Create a practice test using algebra equations from class notes or physics questions from the chapter review, then work through the test with your student. If your student has to prepare for a reading comprehension quiz on *Lord of the Flies*, browse through the book together and make up questions that the teacher might ask. Studying together will build your student's confidence when they show up to take that test and when they sit down to study in the future. Instead of splitting right when she drops the "I have nothing to do" line, taking the time to study with your student shows that you care about her academic success. Students will pick up on that.

Another worthwhile activity (believe it or not) is just talking with your student. Using free time to learn more about your student's interests, challenges, and goals is invaluable. A conversation is positive attention that many young people crave, so ask questions and actually listen. The trust that grows through these conversations will carry over into your tutoring sessions. If you show that you genuinely care about your student, she will feel more comfortable asking for help on an essay or admitting that she doesn't understand her chemistry homework.

Finally, there could be nights when your student finishes her work early. If this is consistently the case, come prepared with good books to read or fun worksheets to complete together. You could even bring in board games like "Apples to Apples" or "Boggle". Staying the whole hour at the shelter is crucial because it shows that you value spending time with your student. It assures your student that she is worth your time, even if she has nothing to do.