

HOW DO MY CHILDREN AND TEENS LEARN?

*A Basic Guide to Learning Styles for Parents**

A **learning style** is the way one approaches new information. Everyone learns differently, and in many cases, children and teens will have a different learning style than their parents or siblings. Knowing the three basic learning styles can help parents understand their children and teens better, and as a result, they will be better equipped to assist their children in overcoming academic challenges.

Here are the three types of learners and their characteristics:

SPATIAL/VISUAL LEARNERS ("LOOKERS")

- tend to (and like to) visualize things (and will often close their eyes to visualize something)
- learn best through images, such as looking at graphs, maps, diagrams, and pictures
- think in pictures
- enjoy reading independently
- use imagery to remember material they hear
- like to take notes
- visualize the scene when reading
- tend to dislike listening for long periods of time
- prefer face-to-face contact with others, as opposed to talking with others on the phone
- tend to remember faces, but have trouble with names
- use language such as "I see" or "I get the picture"
- typically have an easier time than other types of learners recalling information on written exams
- enjoy art, plays, and movies
- often daydream
- are 65% of the population!

✓ **Tips for parents of spatial/visual learners:** Parents can help their children and teens who are spatial/visual learners by teaching them how to use pictures, maps, diagrams, drawings, symbols, color-coding, and other visual cues to understand material. If your children are having trouble visualizing a concept, go online or visit the library to find material that will demonstrate the concept. For example, if your child is reading a passage about a cranberry bog, yet can not picture what this looks like, go online together to find a picture of an actual bog! Or, if s/he is having trouble understanding what "30%" means, draw a circle graph and shade in 30% of the circle so your child can actually "see" the percentage.

LANGUAGE/AUDITORY LEARNERS ("LISTENERS")

- * tend to think in words
- * like to be read to
- * remember information by verbalizing it (saying it out loud)
- * understand things by hearing the explanation
- * relate well to the "spoken word" such as lectures
- * can recall what people say very easily (e.g. can remember and repeat scenes from TV shows and movies verbatim, and are good joke and story tellers)
- * enjoy music and are often musically talented
- * have an easy time remembering names, dates, and trivia
- * solve problems by talking about them
- * prefer to listen first, then take notes later
- * enjoy the dialogue written in books more than the scene or pictures
- * are talkative but have difficulty writing
- * use language such as "I hear you" or "sounds great"
- * prefer to follow verbal instructions instead of written ones
- * are 30% of the population!

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✓ **Tips for parents of language/auditory learners:** Parents can help their children and teens who are language/auditory learners by encouraging them to make up rhymes, songs, stories, and poems to understand new material. Reading notes out loud to children with this learning style (and having them read notes out loud to others) will also help them remember information. Teach them *mnemonics*, or "memory techniques." For example, when learning a math rule, parents can have them repeat the following chant: "Negative times negative equals positive, but positive times positive also equals positive." Do not be alarmed if your language/auditory learner needs music on in the background to concentrate. Provide books on tape to encourage their vocabulary development.

TACTILE/KINESTHETIC LEARNERS ("MOVERS")



- * relate most effectively to touch/physical involvement
- * learn best by doing; like to manipulate things to understand them
- * like to draw pictures
- * like to act things out (enjoy being in skits and plays)
- * prefer to "show" rather than "tell"
- * like action stories when reading (many tactile learners do not like to read for pleasure)
- * enjoy working with their hands;
- * enjoy taking things apart just to see how they work (tend to ignore directions and just jump right in)
- * gesture and use expressive movements
- * are active and do not like to sit still for long periods of time
- * enjoy sports and are naturally athletic
- * enjoy arts and crafts
- * tend not respond well to auditory or visual cues
- * may seem disorganized
- * are "slow talkers" and often use language such as "I feel" or "I get it"
- * tend to have trouble concentrating in a calm/quiet environment
- * are a mere 5% of the population!

✓ **Tips for parents of tactile/kinesthetic learners:** Parents can help their children and teens who are tactile/kinesthetic learners by thinking of hands-on ways their youth can process and learn information. For example, when learning new spelling words, provide letters written on note cards (one letter per card) for them to rearrange physically. Encourage role-playing, hands-on experiments, and outdoor activities such as nature walks. Visit museums that allow visitors to feel, touch, and play with materials as a way to learn about the environment. Provide puzzles and hands-on materials that your child/teen can take apart and manipulate. Do not be alarmed if your children and teens who are this type of learner want to get up and move around when processing information.

☆ **PARENT POINTER:** It may be helpful to share information about children's and teen's learning styles with their teacher(s). Make sure that children and teens are aware of their own learning styles. In addition, ask their teachers how you can work with children at home within the framework of their individual learning styles.

What's your learning style? Here are three online tests that will help you discover your learning style:

- 1) "What's Your Learning Style?" at www.usd.edu/trio/tut/ts/style.html
- 2) "What's Your Learning Style?" at <http://agelesslearner.com/assess/learningstyle.html>
- 3) "The Personal Learning Styles Inventory for Students" at www.howtolearn.com/lsinventory_student.html

RECOMMENDED READING FOR PARENTS:



- Awakening Your Child's Natural Genius: Enhancing Curiosity, Creativity, and Learning Ability, by Thomas Armstrong. Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1991.
- How to Maximize Your Child's Learning Ability by Dr. Lauren Bradway and Barbara Albers Hill. Square OnE Publishers, 2003.
- In Their Own Way by Thomas Armstrong. Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1998.

Sources: "Calling All Senses! An Intersensory Approach to Teaching Phonics," a presentation given by Nancy Telian and Penny Castagnozzi at the 28th Annual Massachusetts Title I Conference (May, 2004); "Children's Learning Styles" by Pam Wynne Fellers at www.fortnet.org/ParentToParent/PFellers/par_jern.html; How to Maximize Your Child's Learning Ability by Lauren Bradway and Barbara Albers Hill (write-up at <http://www.helpingchildrengrow.com/book/php>); "Learning Styles: Do You Know What Kind of Learner Your Are?," by Strategies for Success at www.accd.edu/sac.history/keller/ACCDitg/SSLS.html; "Understanding and Identifying Auditory, Visual and Kinesthetic Learning Styles" and "What's Your Learning Style," at <http://www.usd.edu/trio/tut/ts/styleunder.html>; "What's Your Learning Style" and "Learning Styles Assessment" by Marcia L. Conner at <http://agelesslearner.com/assess/learningstyle.html>; and "Why are Learning Styles Important?" by Sonlight Curriculum at www.sonlight.com/learning-styles.html.