

What's Your Child's Learning Style?

by: June Allan Corrigan

Knowing how he processes information can prove vital to academic success.

Every child, whether a straight A superstar or a struggling C student can benefit if his study habits are in sync with his learning style. The fact is, kids absorb information in lots of different ways. By understanding how your child learns best, you can give him the tools and strategies to master concepts he needs to know now - and in the future.

Most children have a reference or strategy they immediately gravitate towards when asked to solve a problem, says Mary Ann Rafoth, Ph.D., dean of the School of Education and Social Sciences at Robert Morris University in Moon Township, PA. That natural inclination tends to reflect back a little bit of how they learn. By watching for clues, you can determine what kind of learner your child is.

The Visual Learner

If your child is bored by long explanations but responds to interesting graphics on a page, chances are he's a visual learner. As this kind of kid thinks mostly in pictures, language arts may be a struggle. How do you help a "picture smart" child discern punctuation marks, for example? Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., author of *You're Smarter Than You Think: A Kid's Guide to Multiple Intelligences* suggests having them associate different punctuation marks with images. An exclamation mark could become a walking stick and a question mark a hook. Another idea is to equip this type of learner with colored pencils so he can color code things. This could come in handy for a variety of tasks, for instance conjugating verbs. Present tense could be one color, past tense another, and so forth.

The Verbal Learner

This child loves to read and shows a flair for language. She probably grasps subjects like phonics easily but may struggle in math. "Faced with solving a math word problem, the verbal learner would do well to rewrite the problem and make it about themselves, their friends or some topic that's relevant to them," says Rafoth. Drawing on language strengths and putting a problem or newly learned technique into their own words helps verbal learners cement math concepts in their minds. Armstrong recommends "word smart" kids keep a journal in which they verbalize math-solving processes, as in "first I do this, then I do that, etc." This could also be accomplished via audio recording.

The Auditory Learner

The ears and mouth have it for this type of learner. He loves to talk, is a good listener and is most engaged when asking and answering questions and participating in group discussions. So how do you make him settle down and complete a reading assignment? "You can't expect this child to sit in total silence," says Carol Barnier, author of *The Big WHAT NOW Book of Learning Styles*. The obvious solution is to have them read it aloud. Barnier also suggests finding an accompanying audio version of the book if you can so he can listen *and* read at the same time. As for study settings, the auditory learner does best when there's a lot going on around him - so set him up in the kitchen or at the dining room table. He'll probably welcome a little background music as well.

The Kinesthetic Learner

Have a child that won't sit still? Before the chair kicking and pencil tapping drives you crazy, find a way to incorporate motion into homework assignments. Help this kind of child learn spelling words by spreading Scrabble tiles on the floor and have him run and collect the letters he needs, suggests Barnier. Encourage him to walk around the room while reading math problems, stopping only to jot down equations and answers. Kinesthetic learners need something to fiddle with - novelty squishy stress balls work well, for example. For reading and writing assignments requiring more butt-in-chair time, try giving your child one or something similar. "Whatever the motion, it has to be mindless and repetitive," cautions Barnier. "If it's too mindful, the child becomes engaged in what they're handling and they lose focus."

Experts are reluctant to pigeonhole individuals as just possessing one kind of learning style because the truth is most people use a combination of learning styles throughout their life. They maintain a clear preference for one, but even that is subject to change especially in the case of a growing child. "At a developmental level, any five year old is going to be more of a visual learner than an eleven year old," says Rafoth.

So try mixing it up. Encourage the practice of different kinds of skills. Play an audio book for the kinesthetic learner as he moves around the room. Have the auditory learner sit on a big bouncy ball while writing an essay. Substitute math fact flashcards, a common visual and auditory strategy, with a board game. This more kinesthetic approach will have a child counting how many spaces players should advance with each roll of the dice.

A child will always have a favorite go-to learning style to rely upon. But the mark of a truly versatile student is one who's comfortable learning in a number of different ways. Being able to tap into different styles adds novelty and interest to the learning process. It'll often take what was once mundane and turn it into something fun!