

# Children Have Different Ways of Learning

by Paul Daniel

**Back** to school time is exciting for kids. New clothes, new notebooks, possibly new faces in the classroom, and new schools for some. It's a chance for students to start over; many make resolutions to bring up some poor grades from last year, while others determine to continue the success they have previously achieved.

Whatever your child's feelings about school, understanding the senses they tend to use most when absorbing information enables us to formulate strategies to help them concentrate and succeed.

There's a tremendous amount of information available on learning styles and our knowledge of the subject seems to be continually growing. However, there is a consensus among contemporary educators identifying three primary learning styles: auditory (hearing), visual (seeing), and tactile (feeling).

Auditory learners understand information best by hearing. They prefer to talk, listen, and express emotion. Visual learners process information best when they can "see" it; they remember faces, demonstrations, charts or graphs. Tactile learners remember best what they've learned if they can touch objects or associate an activity with the subject.

This simple quiz can help parents determine their child's learning style:

1. Prefers hearing or listening (A)
2. Doodles (V)
3. Moves lips when reading (A)
4. Likes to hear self and others talk (A)
5. Expresses self with gestures and body movements (T)
6. Is quiet; does not talk at length (V)
7. Fidgets when reading (T)
8. Prefers to have ideas demonstrated (V)
9. Remembers faces but not names (V)
10. Tries things out by touching or feeling (T)
11. Needs frequent breaks when studying (T)
12. Studies well with friends (A)
13. Studies well alone (V)
14. Remembers physical events or activities ("I did...") (T)
15. Remembers visual events ("I saw...") (V)

Most people doing this test will have a mixture of A's, T's, and V's, but the greatest number of letters will give you a clue as to the primary learning style. For example, a typical score might be two A's, two T's and three V's, meaning the primary learning style would probably be visual.

Day-to-day contact with your child will help you to identify learning styles. Parents know if they have a "quiet child," most probably a visual learner, or one "who's always into everything," most probably a tactile learner.

To confirm your suspicions, ask your child to recall an experience. When describing it, does he or she close his or her eyes for a moment to focus on the sounds? (A) Does he or she momentarily look off into the distance and describe sights? (V) or does he or she use gestures or his or her whole body to tell you the story? (T)

If your child shows a clear auditory, visual, or tactile preference, you may want to pass this information along to your child's teacher or counselor. Where the child sits, and how he or she is called on to contribute in class, should be influenced by his or her learning style.

Once you have identified your child's learning style, you can suggest study habits and behaviors that will maximize learning potential while keeping your child's interest such as:

### **Auditory Learners**

- Encourage studying with friends and discussing the material.
- Ask them to describe what they learned in class today.
- Suggest they sit near the front, and listen carefully or use a tape recorder in class.
- Offer to quiz them aloud on homework or prior to an exam.
- Use index cards to quiz on vocabulary words or key facts.
- Buy or rent educational tapes, or tapes of books they are reading for school.

### **Visual Learners**

- Encourage them to sit near the front, away from distractions, and take good notes.
- Use highlighters to emphasize ideas, key terms and phrases.
- Encourage them to develop lists, graphs, pictures, and charts to organize information visually.
- Rent classic films, films with historical plots or geographic settings in other parts of the world corresponding with their studies.
- Suggest that they preview chapters before reading by looking at the titles, subtitles, conclusions, or summaries.
- Encourage them to study alone in a quiet place with no interruptions.

### **Tactile Learners**

- Ask them to draw timelines, maps, illustrations, and diagrams of ideas to organize information "manually."
- Suggest they experiment with non-disturbing ways to "move" in class, such as doodling or squeezing a rubber ball.
- Encourage them to change positions often when reading, and take frequent brief breaks that require an activity such as getting a drink of water.
- Allow them to walk around the room while you quiz from note cards.
- Enable them to "do" assignments as a project; for example, when given a choice, do a demonstration rather than write a paper.

When identifying and trying to adjust for different learning styles, remember that different skills will naturally prevail at different times in a child's development. Generally, children will proceed through primarily a tactile phase in grade school, becoming more auditory learners in middle school, and moving toward a more visual learning style in high school.

Parents can have considerable impact on their child's learning style in preschool years by ensuring their children are subjected to a variety of developmentally stimulating activities.

Television, being a “passivity,” does not help stimulate visual or auditory learning ability and should be used sparingly at most. But that’s a whole different column.

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