

What Is Your Child's Learning Style?

Understanding how your child learns can reduce frustration and improve achievement.

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If your child constantly squirms and fidgets when he's doing math homework or insists on listening to music while studying vocabulary words, take heart. Although it may seem like he's trying to drive you crazy, he's probably just using the strategies that help him learn.

"I like to study at a desk in silence, and my daughter can't think that way. She likes to bounce around on a ball with music in the background," says **Maureen McKay**, whose book, [*Optimistic Outcomes: What Every Parent Wants and Every Child Needs*](#), provides tips for parents based on a child's learning style. "Sometimes kids are just doing what works for them."

Educators have long been aware that learning is not one-size-fits-all. In a typical classroom, some kids process information best by hearing the teacher explain it, some learn by seeing what's on the chalkboard, and others learn through hands-on exercises. Colleges have increasingly begun teaching new students about learning styles so they can develop effective study habits. And many primary and secondary schools conduct surveys to give teachers insight into the learning styles of their students. Three basic learning styles are *auditory*, *kinesthetic*, and *visual*.

Most people use a combination of styles but have a clear preference for one. Understanding your child's learning style can reduce homework frustrations and make it easier for families to communicate, says McKay. She observed different learning styles while working as a teacher's aide, and she started researching strategies for working with different learning styles when her daughter began having trouble in elementary school.

Because her daughter had difficulty listening in class, McKay looked for exercises to strengthen listening skills. Her daughter especially enjoyed one approach, listening to an audio book and reading the book at the same time. She's now doing well in middle school, and McKay attributes her success in part to the fact that her teachers and parents came to understand her unique style of learning.

Once you know your child's primary [learning style](#), it's a good idea to let his teacher know what kind of approaches help him learn best. "I find that educators are much more willing to work with you if you're giving them ideas that work for your child," McKay says. "The things that benefit your child are really going to benefit all the kids, so you're not asking for the moon."

Although it may be tempting to stick with what works, keep in mind that a child's preferred learning style may change as she grows and that people who can learn in a variety of ways can more readily absorb information. McKay advises parents to help their children practice using different kinds of skills.

"Really well-balanced students will be able to be comfortable learning in all ways. Knowing that and working on that when they're young gives them a competitive edge," she says.

Parents can use a variety of approaches to help kids learn math facts, for example. When a kid gets bored with flash cards, a visual and auditory strategy, McKay suggests letting him play a family board game that uses two dice and asking him to count how many spaces each player should advance. This is a more kinesthetic approach but may also appeal to visual and auditory learners.

"Being able to tap in to different styles allows you a lot of novelty and adds a lot of fun to homework and chores and interactions at home," McKay explains. For example, if a child resists studying her spelling words, you can ask her to spell the words on a table using Scrabble® tiles.

Being aware of your child's learning style can reduce homework battles and strengthen parent-child relationships. "It's very empowering for families to really understand each other and how they learn and how they think to work out problems," McKay says. "This kind of involvement is a great way to bond with your kids and to impart knowledge, and it's really fun." See Homework Tips

Auditory learners prefer listening to explanations over reading them and may like to study by reciting information aloud. This type of learner may want to have background music while studying, or they may be distracted by noises and need a quiet space to study.

Kinesthetic learners learn by doing and touching. They may have trouble sitting still while studying, and they are better able to understand information by writing it down or doing hands-on activities.

Visual learners process new information by reading, looking at graphics, or watching a demonstration. Children with this learning style can grasp information presented in a chart or graph, but they may grow impatient listening to an explanation.

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