

**Prepared for:**

**South Brunswick Public Schools  
Monmouth Junction, NJ**



# **Help Your Child Develop Good Learning Styles**

**One of a series of Parent Guides from**



## **Parent Guide**

Help Your Child

## **Develop Good Learning Styles**

The Parent Institute

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## Introduction

We've all probably seen it from the time we were in school and we took a field trip to a museum. One of our classmates rushed in to touch everything available, one stood back and read the signs and peered at every corner of the exhibit and another listened carefully as the teacher talked about what we were seeing.

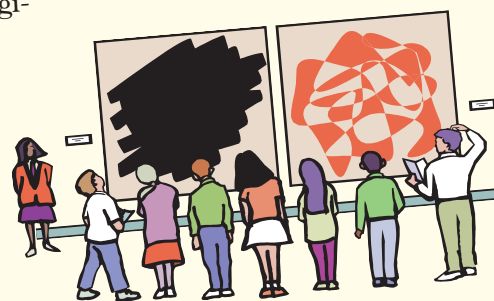
Each of those children was learning in the way that suited him best. Experts agree that we all learn differently—we have different tendencies and preferences as we gather and process information and turn it into knowledge.

Those three classmates—the one who wanted to touch things, the one who needed to hear information and the one who stepped back to read about and examine the exhibit—represent the three primary types of learning styles:

- **Kinesthetic** - Children who learn best by using their bodies or their hands. They want to move and get physically involved with what they're learning.
- **Auditory** - Children who learn by hearing information. They remember things delivered in words or a song and will retain it better if they can talk about it.
- **Visual** - Children who learn by looking at or reading material. They like images of things and enjoy writing and forming letters and often learn to read the quickest. Some theories suggest there are two types of visual learners—those who like words and those who like pictures, charts and graphs.

Noted education expert Howard Gardner believes that people learn in still other ways made possible by what he terms "multiple intelligences" or special abilities that may apply to your child. He and other experts believe that beyond kinesthetic, auditory and visual learning styles, we must also consider additional abilities that affect the way children learn, including:

- **Linguistic** - a gift with words in writing, conversation or reading.
- **Logical/mathematical** - a knack with numbers, and logical thinking or patterns.
- **Interpersonal** - an ability to relate well to others and be a leader.
- **Intrapersonal** - a facility for thoughtful reflection, independent thinking and seeking self-knowledge.
- **Spatial** - the ability to see and represent the world accurately, to interpret spatial ideas and to transform spatial ideas into imaginative and expressive creations.
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic** - an ability to use one's body well and easily.
- **Musical** - an ability to understand and develop musical techniques, respond to music emotionally, interpret musical forms and ideas and even create and perform musical compositions.



(Introduction Continued)

Experts note that a child may have some characteristics of several of these learning styles—in fact, they say that's what parents should strive for. Children who know how to learn in different ways obviously have a better opportunity to get a good education.

And, researchers note that our learning styles change over time. For example, all of us tend to learn kinetically prior to preschool years, and then we seem to develop our individual styles and abilities, putting together our own mix of these skills. Experts believe individual style differences might be because of the way we are genetically programmed, a result of our early experiences or just the way our brains develop differently from person to person.

But Gardner and others note that it is critical to be aware of these different approaches to learning in children and nurture them.

Ideally, children should have teachers who use different teaching techniques and parents who understand their child's specific learning style, or styles. That way they can use and develop the learning styles and abilities that come naturally to them—and strengthen those that are less easy for them.

## Are There Other Explanations for Why Children Learn Differently?

Researchers now think that children may develop an approach to learning in the same way that we seem to be more comfortable using our left or our right hand. We develop preferences.

Researchers now believe that our brain tends to listen to the messages from some senses more closely than it does others. Because of a child's early experiences or genetics or the ways his brain develops, researchers think one of the senses may operate more smoothly and have more influence in the brain.

So one child may be very attuned to that book he is reading, while another is very conscious of the sounds in the other room and yet another just wants to race around rather than do homework at all.



Some children may use parts of various learning styles somewhat equally, but others may have a very strong single style and find that other ways of gathering information are difficult. Traditionally, for example, teaching meant presenting information to students through lectures. Yet it is now believed that less than 15 percent of children are auditory learners.

That is why teachers today are increasingly trying to be conscious of teaching in different ways to reach all types of learners.

A science lesson, for instance, might combine a verbal explanation about how rocks are formed with an interesting visual diagram, or include a song or a movie. Then it might feature various rocks that kinesthetic learners can touch and examine.

*\*Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*

## Why Is It Important to Know How Your Child Learns?

Understanding your child's learning style and strengths will allow you to help her bolster and use those skills while developing still others. Experts say it is important not only to recognize your child's strength and find ways to use that style, but also to improve the other areas.

Children can become frustrated if they face material that is not presented in a way that is comfortable for them. In fact, it is believed that often behavior problems and slumping grades result when a student's style of learning clashes with a teacher's style of teaching.

To learn more about your child's own learning style, see the "Simple Learning Styles Test" on page 5.

When you have identified your child's learning styles and abilities, here are some important things you can do:

- **IMPROVE STUDY HABITS:** Based on your child's strengths, help her develop study routines that work for her.
- **EXPLAIN ABOUT LEARNING STYLES:** Talk to your child about the different ways people learn and their individual strengths. If she understands and feels good about her personal learning styles, she is more likely to learn and less likely to be frustrated.
- **STRENGTHEN WEAK SPOTS:** If your child struggles with paying attention in class or generally doesn't want to get information from a book, find ways to strengthen those weak learning styles.
- **TALK WITH THE SCHOOL:** Communicate with your child's school and teachers—find out about activities that might be available for kids with the same skills or just make them aware of the way your child works best.
- **LOOK FOR APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES:** Find extracurricular activities tailored to your child's unique skills—perhaps athletics for a kinesthetic learner or art classes for those with visual learning strengths.



- **HELP AT HOME:** Homework can be frustrating for all types of learners but you can get a child to consider her best approach to learning by asking these all-purpose homework questions:

1. What do you need to know to do this work? What do you already know about it? How did you learn it?
2. How do you feel when you are doing it, or what do you feel when you get ready to do it? When is doing your homework easier?
3. Which parts of the work are easiest? Which are hardest? Why?

Questions like these (and the Simple Learning Styles Test on page 5) can help you identify your child's learning styles, strengths and weaknesses.



## Simple Learning Styles Test

Here is a simple test to give you a better idea about your child's learning style. It will take three days.

First choose 15 words at the appropriate level for your child from the dictionary and write down the words and their definitions in three lists of five words each.

1. On the first day, ask your child to learn the words and their meanings on the first list with her eyes. She can study them and copy them over as much as she wants but should not speak them.
2. On the second day, ask you child to learn the words and meanings on the second list with her ears as you speak them out loud, repeating them if she wants. She should listen as carefully as she can.
3. On the final day, read her the third list of words and have her learn the words with her hands and body. She can act them out or maybe move to music in a way that makes her think of the words. Then talk with your child about which list of words she understands best. Is it the "seeing" the "listening" words or the "doing" words? The one she chooses is likely to be the one that best represents her learning style.

**Following are some more details about each of the commonly identified learning styles that can help you identify them in your child so that you can work with her strengths.**

**Kinesthetic learners** like to:

- Take things apart.
- Participate in sports, gymnastics or exercise.
- Build models or work with beads and clay.
- Move rather than sit still and study—or they may want to study as they move, maybe memorizing as they pace.
- Touch people or things to express themselves—or to learn.

**Kinesthetic learners** say things like:

- "I need an example."
- "That feels right."
- "Can I hold it?"



You can help **kinesthetic learners** if you:

- Allow them to count on their fingers or use flash cards for math and magnetic letters or scrabble pieces to learn letters and words.
- Help them choose projects that fit their style—a model or a poster rather than a written report.
- Let them walk around while they read or recite spelling words.
- Encourage them to act out stories they like and participate yourself.
- Find outlets for that urge to move, such as sports, dance or karate.

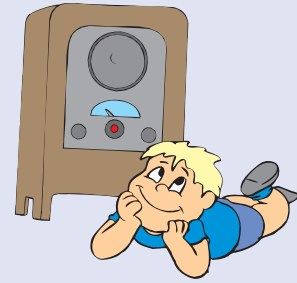


**Kinesthetic learners** might become:

- |             |                    |
|-------------|--------------------|
| • dancers   | • surgeons         |
| • actors    | • race car drivers |
| • athletes  | • outdoor workers  |
| • inventors | • mechanics        |

**Auditory learners** like to:

- Play an instrument, sing, hum or rap.
- Listen to stories or music.
- Say things rather than write them down and perhaps talk to themselves.
- Play music in the background when they concentrate.



**Auditory learners** say things like:

- “Sounds good to me.”
- “I hear what you are saying.”
- “Tell me what this is about.”

You can help **auditory learners** if you:

- Get them to talk to friends or classmates about homework and repeat what has to be done.
- Help them make up songs, rhymes or raps about material they need to recall—such as the “Alphabet song.”
- Read to them or let them listen to a tape while they read
- Get them to explain a concept verbally.
- Let them whisper things to themselves to recall them, or say letters or numbers or other essential skills for learning out loud to process them in their memory.

**Auditory learners** might become:

- performers
- musicians
- recording engineers
- conductors
- piano tuners
- broadcasters

**Visual learners** like to:

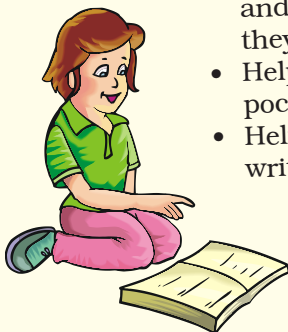
- Read instructions rather than hear them and may even watch your lips move as you speak.
- Look at an attractive map or chart or overhead.
- See pictures, movies, performances or art exhibits.
- Spend time in pleasing, organized space.

**Visual learners** say things like:

- “I see what you mean.”
- “I get the picture.”
- “I wonder what it looks like.”

You can help **visual learners** if you:

- Provide them written instructions and post things on the wall that they need to study or remember.
- Help them stay organized—with color coding and spaces for things or pockets and files for papers.
- Help them use a calendar or checklist for assignments and get them to write down things they have to recall.
  - Get plenty of books and encourage their love of reading, but also get them to consider sensations connected with pictures, or sounds.
  - Get them to use flash cards, charts, pictures or timelines to grasp a concept.



**Visual learners** might become:

- architects
- painters
- sculptors
- naturalists
- physicists
- strategists
- writers.



**You can encourage students' other learning abilities too.**

**Logical**

- Help them organize things carefully.
- Find opportunities to do calculations that challenge them.
- Let them solve mysteries or do puzzles.



**Linguistic**

- Get them to keep a journal and write letters.
- Play word games and read joke books.
- Have them do their own neighborhood newspaper.

**Interpersonal**

- Try to get study partners or encourage group projects at school.
- Have them pretend they are the teacher or boss or co-worker.
- Give them opportunities to help others.

**Spatial**

- Encourage activities including drawing, painting and photography.
- Provide toys that require assembling and building, such as model making and construction kits. When you buy something and find that "Some assembly is required," ask your spatial ability child to help.
- Suggest activities requiring creative expression. Perhaps your child can make a sculpture of his visit to the circus using pipe cleaners or wire.

**Intrapersonal**

- Connect new information with things already learned.
- Pursue hobbies and collections.
- Offer opportunities to patiently talk about things they think are important.

**Bodily-Kinesthetic**

- Encourage craft hobbies, using tools, and building projects.
- Provide opportunities to participate in sports.
- Suggest taking part in school plays, puppet shows and other performances.



**Musical**

- Help your child find a wide variety of music, from rock to classical and jazz and learn more about the ones he likes best.
- Give your child opportunities for musical expression such as participating in the band, a choral group or taking guitar lessons.
- Encourage your child to create his own musical compositions—to sing, play on an instrument, or for others to play.

## 'Disposition' Learning Styles

There are a variety of other theories about learning—even a popular one suggesting that girls and boys learn very differently, and that we can help children learn by accommodating their different approaches to new information.

Among the other theories, Mariaemma Willis and Victoria Kindle Hodson, in a book entitled "Discover your Child's Learning Style," suggest still other categories for the ways children learn. They say we should look at talents, interests, disposition, preferred environment and other issues to get a better profile of our child's learning style.

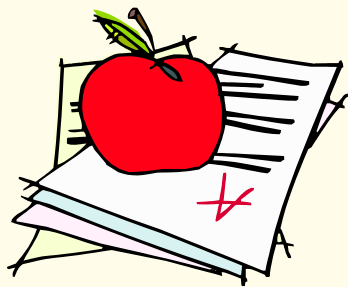
They have categorized and described children—based on action words—within the following groups determined by what they call "disposition":

### 1. Performs

- Likes challenges.
- Enjoys spontaneity.
- Hands on.
- Competitive.
- Center of attention.

### 2. Thinks/Creates

- Creates mental images—daydreams.
- Thinks abstractly—likes new ideas.
- Enjoys being alone.
- Questions—wonders.
- Is imaginative.



### 3. Invents

- Considered "smart."
- Concrete thinker—asks questions.
- Enjoys being alone.
- Technical—focused.
- Experiments.

### 4. Relates/Inspires

- Cares about other's feelings.
- Can get into others shoes.
- Works well with others.
- Creates and enjoys team effort.
- Inspiring.

### 5. Produces

- Likes plans and schedules.
- Does well on tests.
- Memorizes facts well.
- Likes routines and rules.
- Is traditional—wants continuity.
- Is organized and orderly.

Willis and Kindle Hodson suggest that these dispositions affect both how we behave and the way we learn. They say parents and educators aware of these attributes can better tailor education and better handle a child's behavior using the right techniques.

A student who understands, and can make the most of his learning styles, is better able to determine the types of careers he might enjoy and succeed at, they suggest.

No one learning style is automatically better than another. Once you know how your child learns best, you can find ways to support those strengths.

## Help Your Child Develop a Repertoire of Learning Styles

Experts say the most successful children make the most of their natural learning styles and abilities—and learn how to use other styles as well. It is helpful for parents to encourage their children to strengthen learning skills other than those with which they are already comfortable.

For example, you might:

- Encourage a child with kinesthetic tendencies to act out a tune or a story or give them rewards or set goals for comfortable periods of attention given to story-telling or homework.
- Have a child with auditory skills talk out loud while they use blocks or do hands-on activities to develop physical skills. They might listen to a book on tape and read along or play games that involve speaking and observation—such as “I spy.”
- Have a child with a visual learning style find ways to “feel” images—such as books with textures or sculpture or real-life versions of images—such as a doll taken from a favorite book. Have them listen to a book on tape or listen to the distinctive sounds—bird calls or the sounds or music in the background of a movie.



## There's No Single 'Best' Learning Style

It is important to remember that there's no single learning style that all children should try to use. People's learning styles and abilities are as distinctive as their personalities. The goal for us as parents is to try to maximize our children's learning strengths, improve upon their weaker learning skills and help them develop a wide variety of learning “tools” they can use throughout their lives.

We know more about how children learn today than ever before in history and we are constantly learning more. Scholars and researchers will undoubtedly identify an even wider range of learning styles and abilities that we know about today. The most important thing for parents to remember is that children learn in many different ways and the more we can help children match their learning styles to home and school teaching methods, the better they are likely to learn.

## For More Information

### **“Children’s Learning Styles: From Crib to Classroom”**

Moms Helping Moms  
[www.momshelpmoms.com/  
learningstyle.html](http://www.momshelpmoms.com/learningstyle.html)

### ***Differentiation Instruction in the English Classroom: Content, Process, Product and Assessment***

by Barbara King-Shaver and Alice Hunter  
Heinemann  
[www.heinemann.com](http://www.heinemann.com)

### ***Differentiation through Learning Styles and Memory***

by Marilee Sprenger  
Corwin Press  
1-800-818-7243  
[www.corwinpress.com](http://www.corwinpress.com)

### ***Discover your Child’s Learning Style***

by Mariaemma Willis and Victoria Kinale  
Hodson  
Prima Publishing  
[www.primalifestyle.com](http://www.primalifestyle.com)

### **“Learning Styles at Home (Facilitating Children’s Learning)”**

[www.findarticles.com/cf 0/m1041/n2  
v76/20149741/p2/article.jhtml?term](http://www.findarticles.com/cf 0/m1041/n2<br/>v76/20149741/p2/article.jhtml?term)

### **“Michael Gurian’s Homepage”**

[www.michael-gurian.com](http://www.michael-gurian.com)

### **“Reinventing our Schools—A Conversation with Howard Gardner”**

[www.ed.psu.edu/insys/ESD/Gardner/  
Learning.html](http://www.ed.psu.edu/insys/ESD/Gardner/<br/>Learning.html)  
[www.ed.psu.edu/insys/ESD/Gardner/  
Issues.html#parent](http://www.ed.psu.edu/insys/ESD/Gardner/<br/>Issues.html#parent)

### ***What Every Teacher Should Know About Learning, Memory and the Brain***

by Donna Walker Tileston  
Corwin Press  
1-800-818-7243  
[www.corwinpress.com](http://www.corwinpress.com)

### **“What is a Visual Learner”**

The Parent Center  
[www.parentcenter.com/refcap/learning/  
assessing/19245.html](http://www.parentcenter.com/refcap/learning/<br/>assessing/19245.html)

### **“What is an Auditory Learner?”**

The Parent Center  
[www.parentcenter.com/refcap/19287.html](http://www.parentcenter.com/refcap/19287.html)

### **“What is a Physical Learner?”**

The Parent Center  
[www.parentcenter.com/refcap/learning/  
assessing/19298.html](http://www.parentcenter.com/refcap/learning/<br/>assessing/19298.html)

### **“Which Learning Styles Do You Use?”**

The Learning Web  
[www.thelearningweb.net/learningstyles.html](http://www.thelearningweb.net/learningstyles.html)

## **Other Parent Guides Available From The Parent Institute®**

### **Family & Home Set**

*10 Great Ways to Teach Children Responsibility*  
*25 Ways You Can Put the Power of Routines to Work for You and Your Child*  
*52 Great Ways Families Can Spend Time Together*

### **School Readiness—Set 1**

*Developmental Milestones for Preschool Children—Is My Child on Track?*  
*Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—Birth to Age Five*  
*How to Choose the Best Preschool or Day Care for Your Child*

### **School Readiness—Set 2**

*Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them*  
*37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School*  
*Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten*

### **School Success—Set 1**

*The Road to Reading Success—Elementary School Years*  
*Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them*  
*31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child*

### **School Success—Set 2**

*Give Your Child the Edge: Teachers' Top 10 Learning Secrets Parents Can Use*  
*How to Help Children Do Their Best on Tests*  
*Helping Children Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork*

### **School Success—Set 3**

*Help Your Child Develop Good Learning Styles*  
*How to Instill the Character Traits of Success in Your Child*  
*Seven Proven Ways to Motivate Children to Do Better in School*

### **When There is a Problem—Set 1**

*Help Your Child Deal With Bullies and Bullying*  
*Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure*  
*How to Help Your Struggling Student*

### **Other Important Titles**

*Common Discipline Problems of Teenagers and How to Solve Them*  
*What to Do If Your Child Has ADD/ADHD*  
*Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them*  
*Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School*

*For more information about these and other materials for  
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

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