

# CHILDRENS' LEARNING STYLES

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Many people recognize that each individual prefers different learning styles and techniques. Learning styles group some of the common ways in which individuals learn. Everyone has a combination of learning styles. Some people may find that they have a dominant style of learning, with far less use of the other styles. Others may find that they use different styles in different circumstances. There is no ideal combination, nor are these styles fixed. Individuals can develop their abilities in less dominant styles, as well as further develop styles that they already use well<sup>1</sup>.

Technically speaking, an individual's learning style refers to the preferred way in which he or she absorbs, processes, comprehends and retains information. Individual learning styles are often dependent on cognitive, emotional and environmental factors, as well as an individual's prior experience. In other words: everyone's different<sup>2</sup>. When parents are able to identify their child's predominant learning style, they can help their child to learn more effectively. Part of this process is for parents to better understand their *own* learning style, because parents generally tend to make use of that style during interactions with their children<sup>3</sup>. There are four main styles of learning:

1. **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 when listening to an explanation. Children who are visual processors tend to observe a parent or teacher's body language and facial expressions for content and learn through demonstrations and descriptions. They tend to have well-developed imaginations and often think in pictures. Too much movement or activity may cause distraction for them. For older children who read, written instructions may help to clarify verbal directions. Homework and study tips for predominantly visual learners include: Using flash cards; studying charts, tables, and maps; drawing illustrations; writing things down and reviewing notes; highlighting and underlining; and colour-coding information.
2. **Auditory Learners** prefer listening to explanations rather than reading them and may like to study by reciting information aloud. Children who are auditory processors learn through participating in discussions and talking things through. Verbal directions may help to clarify written information. 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. Homework and study tips for predominantly auditory learners include: Talking to themselves or with others about what they're learning; reciting important information aloud (perhaps even recording it and playing it back); reading a book and listening to the audio book at the same time; using word associations; setting information to a tune and singing it to help remember it; and limiting distracting noises.
3. **Tactile Learners** tend to learn through touch. Children who are more tactile tend to prefer activities or projects that allow them to use their hands. These children may also prefer doodling or drawing to aid memory. Homework and study tips for predominantly tactile learners include: Reading aloud and tracking words on a page with their finger; writing things down multiple times to commit them to memory; highlighting; and underlining.
4. **Kinesthetic Learners** learn through moving and doing. Children who are more kinesthetic learn through physical sensations and may have trouble sitting still for long periods of time. They are better able to understand information by writing it down. A hands-on approach that allows children with this learning style to actively explore their physical world helps them to learn best. Homework and study tips for predominantly kinesthetic learners include: Playing with a stress ball, paper clip or small toy while studying; moving around or taking frequent breaks; and doing hands-on activities such as building models or playing games<sup>4</sup>.

Most people make use of a combination of styles but have a clear preference for one. Understanding your child's learning style can help to reduce homework frustrations and make it easier for families to communicate. Although it may be tempting to stick with what works, keep in mind that a child's preferred learning style may change as they grow and that individuals who can learn in a variety of ways can more readily absorb information. Parents are encouraged to help their children explore the use of a variety of different learning techniques.

For a list of references and links to more information on this topic please visit <http://www.christinedarney.co.za/Psych-Ed/psych-ed.html>