

A color photograph of a young boy and girl smiling at the camera. The boy, on the left, has short blonde hair and is wearing a yellow polo shirt. The girl, on the right, has blonde hair tied back with a brown clip and is wearing a white tank top with dark blue shoulder straps. They are standing in front of a silver car.

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Back to School 2013

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contents



DEPARTMENTS

02 Welcome**04 Chalkboard****07 At Home**

7 Simple Homework Tips
Help Your Child Succeed

28 At School

Tips From the Principal

31 Online Extras**32 Family Matters**

Let's Go to the Polls!



FEATURES

10 How Your Child Learns Best

Understanding your child's learning style can reduce frustration and improve achievement.

16 What's for Breakfast?

The foods your kids eat in the morning can affect how they perform that day. Here are some tips for getting them off to a healthier start.

21 When Is It OK To Fail?

A parent's instinct is often to jump in and help with a problem. But sometimes it pays to hang back.

24 Fun At-Home Learning Activities

Reinforce your child's classroom learning with simple grade-level activities you can do together.



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

How Your Child LEARNS BEST

BY EMILY GRAHAM

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 author Maureen McKay, whose website, Optimistic Outcomes, provides tips

for parents based on a child's learning style. "Sometimes kids are just doing what works for them."

Educators have long known that learning is not a one-size-fits-all concept. 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 started teaching new students about learning styles so they can develop effective study habits. And many primary and

>> Find Your Learning Style

Take the simple quiz to see how you like to learn.
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secondary schools conduct surveys to give teachers insight into their students' learning styles. Three basic learning styles are *auditory*, *kinesthetic*, and *visual*.

Auditory learners prefer listening to explanations rather than reading them and may like to study by reciting information aloud. This type of learner may want to have background music while studying, or 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.

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, McKay says. 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 a difficult time listening in class, McKay looked for exercises to strengthen listening skills. Her daughter especially enjoyed one approach, listening to an audiobook and reading the print book at the same time. She did well in middle school, and McKay attributes that in part to the fact that her teachers and parents came to understand her particular style of learning.

Once you know your child's main learning style, it's a good idea to let his teacher know what kind of approaches help him learn best.

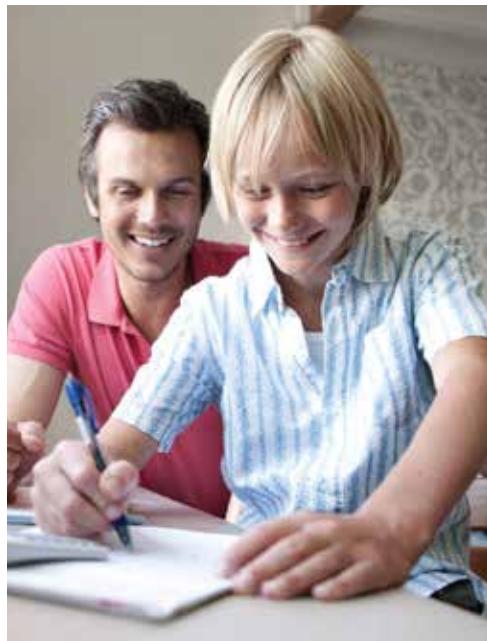
"I find that educators are much more willing to work with you if you're giving them ideas that work for your child," McKay says. "The great thing is that the things that benefit your child are really going to benefit all the kids, so you're not asking for the moon."

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 child 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, ask her to try spelling the words on a table using Scrabble tiles.

Being aware of your child's learning style

can reduce homework battles and strengthen your relationship with her. "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." 

Homework Help for Each Learning Style



AUDITORY LEARNERS

are typically good at absorbing information from spoken words. Strategies that work well for auditory learners include:

- Talking to themselves or with others about what they're learning
- Reciting important information out loud, perhaps 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
- Limiting distracting noises

KINESTHETIC LEARNERS

prefer to be active while studying and may not be able to focus while sitting still.

Strategies for kinesthetic learners include:

- Reading aloud and tracking words on a page with a finger
- Writing things down multiple times to commit them to memory
- Highlighting and underlining
- Playing with a stress ball or toy while studying
- Moving around or taking frequent breaks
- Doing hands-on activities, such as building models or playing games



VISUAL LEARNERS

benefit from seeing information on a chalkboard or in an illustration and may grow impatient listening for long periods of time. Strategies for visual learners include:

- Using flash cards
- Studying charts, tables, and maps
- Drawing illustrations
- Writing things down and reviewing notes
- Highlighting and underlining
- Color-coding information

