



## Understanding Learning Styles

**P**eople learn in different ways. Some learn best by seeing, others by hearing, and still others by touching. Knowing our preferred learning style helps us learn and remember new things.

There are three basic learning styles:

- Auditory (hearing the information)
- Visual (seeing the information)
- Kinesthetic-tactile (touching, participating)

When parents know their child's best way to learn, they can help their child learn more effectively. It is just as important for you to know your own learning style. Parents usually teach in their preferred learning style, which may be different from the child's. This can be frustrating for both parent and child.

For example, imagine that you are a strong auditory learner and try to verbally explain the rules of baseball to your child who is more visual and really has to *see* the various moves in a diagram!

Even though we have a preferred learning style, we can still learn in other ways. People have varying degrees of preference – some are highly auditory, some are highly visual, some are highly kinesthetic-tactile (k-t), while others seem to have a moderate preference for all three styles of learning.

At any age, your child will learn more easily using his preferred learning style, but this doesn't mean he can't and won't learn any other way. In fact, he should be encouraged to use and improve *all* modes of learning. The more senses we use to learn about anything, the more information we get! A good guideline is to allow your child to use his preferred style when learning essential information (e.g., road safety) and to practise using other learning modes for things that are not as important (e.g., words to songs you sing on car trips). The auditory learner will

enjoy listening to tape-recorded songs; the visual learner will enjoy reading the words as he hears them sung; the k-t learner will enjoy dancing or acting as the music conductor.

Young children are all kinesthetic-tactile learners. Watch your baby put everything in her mouth and your toddler reach out to touch and explore his world. Visual and auditory preferences may emerge later. Schools have traditionally used visual and auditory teaching styles, especially in the upper grades. Children who learn easily through these modes are usually successful in school, while k-t learners often find school difficult. Most of us – not only young children – learn better if we are actively involved in our own learning.

Of course, all future learning is affected by early learning experiences. If these experiences are positive and satisfying, the foundations are formed for enthusiastic lifelong learning. Attention to learning styles when your child is young will help to make learning positive and enjoyable. As she matures, she will better understand and facilitate her own lifelong learning. For example, a visual learner who must remember information given at a lecture (auditory model), will know that she needs to take notes, make sketches or read a book on the topic to reinforce the lecture content.

Observe your child at play. Does she already show a preferred way to learn? Remember that young children are still developing and most are very tactile – they want and need to be actively involved in order to understand things. Make sure your child has many opportunities to use all of the learning styles so that she can develop to her full potential.

### Learning Style Checklist

Review the following lists. What do you think is your preferred learning style?

#### Auditory learners often:

- enjoy oral discussion
- remember by talking out loud
- need to have things explained orally
- have trouble with written instructions
- talk to themselves while learning something new
- repeat a telephone number in order to remember it

#### Visual learners often:

- remember visual details
- prefer to see what they are learning
- like to have paper and pens handy
- doodle while listening
- have trouble following lectures
- like to write down instructions or telephone numbers

#### Kinesthetic-tactile learners often:

- prefer activities
- want to actually do whatever is being talked about or learned
- like to move around while listening or talking
- often "talk" with their hands
- like to touch things in order to learn about them
- remember things by recalling who did what rather than who said what