



## Recognizing Learning Styles

Not all children, or adults for that matter, learn new information the same way. All individuals have unique learning styles that relate to how they learn best. Learning styles help to define the specific strengths and weaknesses unique to each individual.

Parents should not expect their child to learn in the same ways they learned when they were children. Children in the same family will also learn differently. "There is no good or bad learning style; each enables that person to learn. However, many parents and teachers do not understand, and therefore, do not acknowledge children's diverse learning patterns. When those adults disparage how certain children try to learn, they inadvertently encourage those youngsters to study in the wrong way [for the youngster]" (*Jolly, Treffinger, Inman & Smutny, 2011*). When parents recognize their children have unique learning styles, they rarely discuss this with their children. Just as it is important to recognize the uniqueness of each child, it is important to discuss why each child might have similar or different learning styles than other family members. This knowledge helps children recognize their unique talents while also developing an understanding that all individuals they will encounter in other settings may also be unique and different as well. This is a skill that will help them to build strong relationships with people who are both similar and different than they are throughout their lifetime.

"When people use, rather than ignore their natural styles, they learn more, more quickly, and with less frustration than they do when trying to use someone else's style" (*Jolly, Treffinger, Inman & Smutny, 2011*). A good way to determine an individual's learning style is to complete a learning style survey. Teachers use a learning style survey to help differentiate instruction to match the unique needs of students in the classroom. Parents can use learning style surveys to help understand how to support the learning of children at home. There are many learning style surveys available on the internet parents can use at home. Consider using more than one survey and administer to all family members to help lead family discussions about how learning styles affect our learning, thinking, and work habits at home, school, and work.

## Supporting the Strengths of Gifted Children.

Parents and teachers need to learn how to respond appropriately to the unique learning style needs of children by providing learning environments that support the child's strengths. Gifted students may exhibit more extreme reactions and unhappiness to learning environments that are not a good match. There are factors to consider when creating a supportive learning environment for gifted children.

**Environmental Needs:** Some children need quiet, organized learning spaces while others are more productive in cluttered spaces listening to soft music. Some children are easily distracted by electronic devices while others have improved focus with background noise. Some children are more comfortable sitting in a traditional desk and chair while others might have improved focus sitting on a couch or outside in the fresh air. The key is to keep children comfortable and focused on their school work.

**Physical Needs:** Some children have more focus in the morning while others are energized at night. Some children need to fidget periodically to keep their brain focused while others prefer to be quiet and still. Some children can be bothered by itchy clothing tags or uncomfortable socks which can affect how well they focus or perform on schoolwork. For children who get cold easily, a warm sweater or drink may help them to think more clearly. Other children prefer cool rooms, even in winter, to help them focus. Brights lights can either help children think or be a distraction and cause headaches. Consider switching to natural light or soft light bulbs if children are complaining of headaches.

**Brain Functioning:** Children have different ways of learning information that is directly tied to brain functioning. Some children learn more easily either hearing information, reading information, or visualizing information. An important factor to consider is whether they are auditory or visual learners. Auditory learners process or learn information more efficiently when they are able to hear the information and focus on the details and facts. Visual learners prefer to examine pictures, visuals, and big ideas while learning. The chart below helps to differentiate between the two styles of learning.

| <b>Auditory-Sequential Learners</b>    | <b>Visual-Spatial Learners</b>                    |
|--|---|
| Focuses on the details and facts       | Focuses on the big ideas, may miss details        |
| Learns and thinks with words and facts | Learns and thinks with pictures and visuals       |
| Highly organized and often neat        | Unique organizational styles, often messy         |
| Develops one good answer or idea       | Develops several answers or ideas                 |
| Strong auditory short-term memory      | Strong long-term visual memory                    |
| Good at mathematics computation        | Better at math reasoning than computation         |
| Ability to memorize facts and ideas    | Ability to see connections between ideas          |
| Learns well through formal instruction | Develops own ways of learning                     |
| Learns well despite personal emotions  | Negative attitudes may affect academic motivation |

*(Modified from The Gifted Development Center.)*