

Getting To Know Your Child's Learning Style

by Nathalie Kunin

Have you ever been asked "How are you smart?" Probably not. Have you ever been asked "How smart are you?" Probably – or you've asked yourself this question? The same four words in a different order can make all the difference when attempting to quantify intelligence. We have many measures that tell us how smart we are in different subjects, but very few that tell us how we learn and process information.

Intelligence has long been characterized into two forms, purely verbal and logical reasoning, however, some educators propose that IQ is much more than a concentration of these two areas. In the early 1980's, Howard Gardner, a Harvard professor, developed "The Theory of Multiple Intelligences" where he defined different types of intelligence and he categorized them into eight areas.

The ability to understand how your child processes information can help redefine academic, social and emotional expectations and how you view your child as a learner. Discovering how your child perceives the world, which is most likely differently from you, can be an eye-opening experience which allows you to identify with your child in a much more productive and meaningful way.

The following is a summary of the eight learning styles and some tips on how you can actively encourage your child's dominant style of learning:

VERBAL-LINGUISTIC intelligence describes children who learn best by seeing, hearing and saying words. They enjoy storytelling, debate, reading, journaling and word games. Verbal-Linguistic learners generally love impromptu speaking, so have them study and learn new information by storytelling, speaking aloud, creating riddles and puns and using debate techniques. Create word games out of spelling and vocabulary words and put math problems into words.

MATHEMATICAL-LOGICAL learners excel at forming concepts and seeking out abstract patterns and relationships. These children reason deductively and have strong problem-solving skills. They often love patterns, games and deciphering codes. Talk through assignments with mathematical-logical learners and encourage them to find the patterns in rhyming words, spelling rules and math facts. Parents can help them organize their work space and prioritize study materials.

VISUO-SPATIAL learners respond best to images, pictures and color. They like maps, mazes and puzzles, and often love to draw, sculpt and paint. They are also drawn to photography, multi-media and design. Visuo-Spatial learners have active imaginations so encourage them to draw, build and create. Adding their artistic signature to assignments will make learning more meaningful to them.

MUSICAL LEARNERS are sensitive to pitch and rhythm, they easily remember melodies, and enjoy listening to sounds and music in general. Musical learners memorize more easily if the answers or patterns are sung or tapped out. They have highly attuned listening skills so encourage them to set any type of memorization to music or a beat. If you remember the movie Akeela and the Bee, Akeela jumped rope as she memorized spelling words.

BODILY-KINESTHETIC learners use their bodies to solve problems, express emotions, and convey ideas. They usually are highly coordinated, skilled at taking things apart and putting them back together and they are hands-on learners. Incorporate full-body activities such as dance, board games, sports and drama to help these children learn and communicate.

INTERPERSONAL learners process information best when they have dynamic interaction with other people. These children learn by relating and cooperating. They generally prefer group problem solving and they like to volunteer for group activities. Interpersonal learners like to have a study partner or group and ask to do homework at the kitchen table. Parents might need to encourage their interpersonal learner to work on their own so they can develop independent study skills.

INTRAPERSONAL learners have a deep awareness of their inner feelings, dreams and ideas. They often learn best when left to themselves as they are mindful, reflective and comfortable being alone. Parents should check in periodically with their Intrapersonal learners, but be sensitive to their natural inclination to work alone. Parents sometimes have to encourage these highly independent children to join groups and work with others to help develop flexibility and cooperative learning skills.

NATURALIST learners easily recognize various plants and animals and instinctively understand how nature interacts with civilization. These children enjoy discovery, like to investigate and observe their surroundings and can adapt to many environments. Children with naturalistic intelligence like to classify things, whether it's a grammar rule or a dinosaur. Parents can help them by breaking down concepts and incorporating field trips to natural settings where they can explore.

Understanding and actively encouraging your child's learning style will open doors to academic success, new hobbies and even future careers. Recognizing and celebrating your child's dominant learning style will make them more confident students who recognize that the determining question is not "How smart am I?" but rather, "How am I smart?"