



## Discover How They Learn By Tracy Gosnell

When I started homeschooling, I did the most natural thing. I decided to teach my children the way I had learned as a child. I reasoned that it must work, as I did well. I quickly learned that sitting at the desk listening to me and then doing “seat work” did not work well with our children. It did not help me to have a two-year-old child running around and grabbing things. I think all of us ended up in tears more than once. During this transition, I began to realize that mimicking a classroom setting was not going to work in this homeschool. Thus began a journey of trying to find the best way to teach my children, based on the “discovery” that all children are not created equal when it comes to learning.

I discovered during this “on the job training” that I needed to determine the learning styles of each of our children. I discovered there are three basic types of learning styles which include: kinesthetic learners, visual learners, and auditory learners. Most children have some characteristics of all three of these learning styles, but, as they grow and develop, one style will generally become more prevalent. Let me explain.

Kinesthetic learners tend to be more active, moving about and enjoying hands-on learning. Most young children learn this way. Crawling and toddling children have to pick something up, feel it, taste it, and see where it will fit. This is true of children through kindergarten-age where exploring and learning through doing is how they learn and retain information. As children progress during the early elementary years, they tend to develop more characteristics of visual learning. They want to be shown how to do the task, and charts or pictures help them understand a new concept. In the later elementary years and on into the middle school years, those who are auditory learners will tend to learn by hearing what needs to be done or learned. Auditory learners do well in the traditional lecture-style setting.

Being aware of the characteristics of the different learning styles will help you understand how your children learn. Listed below are a few characteristics for each learning style and ideas to help your child learn, as documented in research from Lehigh University.

### \*Characteristics of a Kinesthetic Learner

- Learns through moving, doing, and touching, a hands-on method, actively exploring the world around them
- Enjoys tasks that involve manipulating materials and objects
- Remembers what was done, but has difficulty recalling what was said or seen
- Often doodles while listening, thus processing information
- Often is adventurous
- May find it hard to sit still for long periods
- May become distracted by the need for activity and exploration

Needs to be active and take frequent breaks  
Ideas that might help your Kinesthetic Learner:

- Take frequent study breaks and vary your activities.
- Make studying more physical—work at a standing desk, pace or walk while memorizing, mold a piece of clay, squeeze a tennis ball or relaxation ball.
- Use bright colors to highlight reading material.
- Play music in the background while you study.

### Characteristics of a Visual Learner

- Learns through seeing, reading, observing, enjoys visual stimulation
- Enjoys maps, pictures, diagrams, and color
- Often closes his/her eyes to visualize or remember something
- May think in pictures and learn best from visual displays, such as diagrams, illustrated textbooks, overhead transparencies, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and handouts
- Finds something to watch if bored
- Benefits from illustrations and presentations that use color

### Ideas that might help your Visual Learner

- Use visual materials such as pictures, charts, maps, and graphs or have your child make his/her own.
- Use multi-media such as computers or videos.
- Study in a quiet place away from verbal disturbances.
- When memorizing material, write it over and over.
- Keep pencil and paper handy, so you can write down good ideas.

### Characteristics of an Auditory Learner

- Learns through listening, verbal lectures, discussion, talking things through, and listening to what others have to say
- Prefers directions given orally
- Prefers lectures to reading assignments
- Often repeats what has just been said
- Often benefits from reading text aloud
- Remembers by verbalizing the lessons

### Ideas that might help your Auditory Learner

- Think aloud and talk to yourself.
- Read text aloud.
- Create musical jingles and mnemonics to aid memorization.
- Discuss your ideas verbally.
- Recite information over and over to better memorize material.

When my sister first started teaching, she taught early elementary. I had the opportunity to volunteer as an aide in her classroom. I noted her ability to teach her students new things by presenting concepts using techniques from each learning style. She would first teach them the information. Then they explored the concept with learning stations that were set up for each style. During their rotation time, you could see which station helped them understand the new concept. As I endeavored to understand how my children learn, I remembered this approach. I tried different ways to help them learn. Some of our fondest memories during this journey include writing with our fingers in a smear of shaving cream on a plastic table, learning math by going grocery shopping, and making up or learning little songs to help us memorize parts of speech or the measurements that make up a mile.

Homeschooling is different for everyone. It takes some creativity at times, but homeschool parents have a wonderful opportunity to discover how their children learn. The investment is well worth the time, and it pays dividends that include a lower-stress learning environment.

If you would like to learn more about how children learn, check out the book *The Way They Learn* by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias (Tyndale House 1996)

### References

Characteristics of a Tactile/Kinesthetic Learner. (n.d.). Retrieved February 6, 2014, from Lehigh University: [http://www.lehigh.edu/disabilities/cas/pdfs/LS\\_Tactile\\_Learner.pdf](http://www.lehigh.edu/disabilities/cas/pdfs/LS_Tactile_Learner.pdf)

Characteristics of a Visual Learner. (n.d.). Retrieved February 6, 2014, from Lehigh University: [http://www.lehigh.edu/disabilities/cas/pdfs/LS\\_Visual\\_Learner.pdf](http://www.lehigh.edu/disabilities/cas/pdfs/LS_Visual_Learner.pdf)

Characteristics of an Auditory Learner. (n.d.). Retrieved February 6, 2014, from Lehigh University: [http://www.lehigh.edu/disabilities/cas/pdfs/LS\\_Auditory\\_Learner.pdf](http://www.lehigh.edu/disabilities/cas/pdfs/LS_Auditory_Learner.pdf)

Tracy Gosnell is a homeschool parent from Killeen, Texas. She is a Homeschool Representative for the Nazarene Educators Worldwide Council. For more articles or information, go to [www.naznew.org](http://www.naznew.org).