

Why Students Learn Differently or may be Struggling Academically

LEARNING STYLES

There are three main learning styles—visual, auditory and kinesthetic. If the teaching methods of the classroom do not match a student's strengths or learning style, this may affect learning and behavior. As a tutor you have the advantage of working on-to-one with your students and can explore their learning styles, interests, and strengths. For example, you might find out that one is a kinesthetic learner who learns best through physical activities. You can help your students by tailoring your lessons to their learning styles and by using a combination of learning styles that reaches all students. For more information on teaching to different learning styles, see end of chapter.

DIFFERENCES IN CULTURE, TRADITIONS, LANGUAGE

Students come from many cultures with different values, behaviors and expectations. Many students speak a different language at home than they do at school. Family and cultural background can greatly affect how your student responds to you and how they learn. *For example, one might come from a culture where learning is a cooperative, shared process and find it disheartening to work on her own.*

You can help your students by: 1) having them share their family beliefs and traditions through reading, writing speaking, and learning activities; 2) helping them to understand the rules and values of the school culture and how these differ from the home culture; 3) tailoring lessons to the learning style of the student; 4) providing ESL education as needed.

SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

Students may have difficulty learning and need special materials and assistance. *For example, one student might be learning disabled and find it difficult to read words. He might also have ADD (attention deficit disorder) finding it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork.*

Students who are **learning disabled** may be creative and intelligent but find it difficult to do certain tasks such as reading words, spelling, using language mechanics, and remembering math facts. You can help these students by using their strengths and individual learning style to help them learn.

Students with **mental retardation** may take longer to complete assignments and may have difficulty understanding abstract concepts. You can help these students by focusing on teaching comprehension skills, relating abstract concepts to their own experiences, and give them extra learning time.

Students with **ADD or ADHD** (*attention deficit hyperactive disorder*) cannot filter out all of the sights, sounds, and activities in their environment and may have great difficulty focusing on their school work. Students with ADD are often quietly disengaged while students with ADHD are hyperactive and may act impulsively. You can help these students by giving opportunities to learn in a quiet and “non-busy” environment and by using a kinesthetic learning style. You can also help them by giving them opportunities to discharge their energy.

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Speech, hearing, eyesight, coordination, or body movement problems may mean that students must be given extra assistance to learn. *For example, a student might have cerebral palsy that makes it difficult for her to use her hands; she will need to find ways to learn in spite of her physical difficulties.* You can help students by checking with their teachers to see what materials and methods will help them to learn. If you notice a student having difficulty seeing or hearing, report it to the teacher. A simple exam followed by glasses or a hearing aid may open up a whole new world of learning for a student.

SOCIAL PRESSURES

Students may be faced with social pressures—the need to be popular, the need to buy expensive clothes, the need to belong at any cost—that may encourage them to participate in risky behaviors such as membership in gangs, using violence to assert their identity, or experimentation with drugs and alcohol. *For example, a student might drift toward drug use as a way to block out emotional pain and to belong to a group of peers.* As a mentor/tutor, you can listen, remain supportive, and direct the student to a counselor or community resources.

FAMILIES IN CHANGE OR CRISES

A child’s family is their foundation. When change or crisis occurs in families, students must often focus their attention on the needs of the family. They may find it difficult to attend school, to focus on schoolwork, to complete assignments, or to follow through on tasks. They may also have difficulty getting along with peers and show behaviors such as withdrawal or aggression. You can help students by developing a mentoring relationship—by being a stable and supportive force in their lives, by listening and allowing them to express their feelings and needs through learning activities, and by referring them to school counselors and community resources. You can also use materials and activities that allow students to reflect on real-life problems/solutions while you work on learning together.

Remember, your job is not to solve family difficulties but to assist students in making a transition from personal concerns to school.



MORE ON LEARNING STYLES

Through observation, interaction and discovering a child's interests, you can determine which learning styles would best facilitate the learning process. Remember we usually learn best by using a variety of techniques, so engage your student by creating dynamic ways of instruction.

Learning Styles	Tutoring Tips
Characteristics of a Visual Learner	Strategies for a Visual Learner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remembers words by their appearance • Notices details • Enjoys books, pictures and demonstrations • Pays attention to color, size and location of objects or details • Responds well to visual order and neatness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use matching games, charts, maps and graphs • Use color to highlight concepts • Highlight important details of a lesson • Make flashcards as a memorization tool • Use models and demonstrations • Use pictures to reinforce vocabulary or spelling words.
Characteristics of a Auditory Learner	Strategies for a Auditory Learner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns best by listening and speaking • Needs verbal discussion to learn new concepts • Easily memorizes words to songs or poems • Enjoys talking • Often asks questions about instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recite and practice spelling words aloud • Use tape recordings for reinforcement work • Help the student talk through the tasks/concepts • Give instructions verbally as well as in writing • Read aloud to your student and have them read to you • Teach your student how to use a mnemonic device for memorizing facts
Characteristics of a Kinesthetic Learner	Strategies for a Kinesthetic Learner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns through movement, experiencing and hands on-projects • May be restless and need frequent breaks • Needs an organized, consistent schedule • Wants to feel and touch things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan activities, projects and hand-on lessons • Take short breaks and move around • Use concrete objects to demonstrate concepts in math or vocabulary • Work in different locations and positions • Model skills and let the student try using drama or role-play • Clap out or tap numbers