

# How Is Your Child Smart?

*Boost your child's success by understanding his learning style.*



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Over two decades after Howard Gardner identified multiple intelligences in his ground-breaking book *Frames of Mind* (1983), educators around the world have been using the theory of multiple intelligences in their classrooms. In some ways, parents and teachers have always intuitively known that children learn in different ways and that an activity that grabs one child may not be of interest to another. But many of our traditional ideas about teaching imply that there is a certain way to learn particular skills. As parents, we've all had times when we've become frustrated by our children's apparent inability to accomplish a task the way we were taught to do it. When we have a better understanding of their individual intelligences and learning styles, we can provide experiences that speak to how our children learn best.

The eight intelligences are:

1. Linguistic
2. Logical-mathematical
3. Bodily-kinesthetic
4. Musical
5. Spatial
6. Naturalist
7. Interpersonal
8. Intrapersonal

To understand your child's learning style, observe her as she plays. Which toys does she tend to choose? Chances are, you'll notice that her favorites have something in common. Perhaps they all have bright colors and distinct patterns or interesting textures and shapes, or make sounds. Then look at how she plays: Does she tend to look at objects intently or to hold and feel them in her hands? Perhaps she is less interested in toys than in rolling, tumbling

and moving around. As you cuddle up with your child and a favorite book, pay attention to what she is most interested in. Is it looking at the illustrations? Listening to the cadence of the words and rhymes as you read aloud? Touching the different objects pictured on the page? Or does she practically leap out of your lap and start to act out the actions in the story as you describe them?

Most children have a number of different intelligences and learning styles and can be engaged in a variety of ways. If you don't see a strong preference for particular toys or games, it means that your child has more than one primary intelligence or that she isn't old enough to have developed a strong predilection. In most cases, you can begin to see a preference for particular styles at around age 2. By then your child will most likely respond best to specific activities and types of experiences.

Respecting individual intelligences and learning styles means offering your child a variety of ways to learn. This doesn't mean that you should shy away from helping him master certain skills — almost anything can be taught in a way that works well for a specific intelligence. When you identify and respond to your child's intelligence and learning style, you help him approach the world on his own terms. Playing to his strengths can make mastering new skills less frustrating — and can help him develop a lifelong love of learning.

### **Many ways to learn**

One of the benefits of the multiple intelligence theory is that it offers parents many options — if a child isn't responding to a particular activity, there are many other approaches to try. Once you have a sense of your child's learning style, take a look at your home environment and routine to see how well it works for the way she learns. If you find that your child gravitates toward music, make sure that she has instruments available. Try playing music throughout the day and using songs as a way to encourage her enjoyment of different activities (a special song for doing the dishes or going grocery shopping can go a long way!). If she seems to have a powerful physical, or bodily-kinesthetic, intelligence, remember that creating fun hopping or jumping games to play while you're waiting in lines or at the store can help to make these tough times easier.

While understanding your child's style helps you speak to his strengths, it is also important to give him opportunities to strengthen his weaknesses: Even if you're sure your child is a linguistic learner, there is plenty to be gained from engaging him in spatial or musical experiences. Here's a look at each kind of intelligence and the types of activities and experiences children tend to excel at with that learning style:

### **Linguistic**

**What it is:** Sensitivity to the meaning and order of words. These children use an expanded vocabulary and usually like to tell jokes, riddles or puns. They also like to read, write, tell stories and play word games.

A good way to engage a language-oriented child in a home science experiment, for example, is to encourage him to describe and record exactly what he is doing and observing. To help him understand a concept such as counting, ask him to create a story in which a character has to count many items. Have paper, writing material, different types of storybooks, and a tape recorder handy.

### **Logical-mathematical**

**What it is:** The ability to handle chains of reasoning and to recognize patterns and order. These learners enjoy

working with numbers, want to know how things work, ask lots of questions, and collect items and keep track of their collections.

To interest a logical-mathematical learner in a picture book, have her sort and classify the different items or animals she sees in it. Asking her to compare the different sounds and tones various instruments can make is a good way to help her explore musical concepts. Good items to have on hand include puzzles, blocks and small manipulatives to count with.

### **Bodily-kinesthetic**

**What it is:** The ability to use the body skillfully and to handle objects adroitly. Kinesthetic learners enjoy sports and love to be physically active. They tend to use body language, dance, act or engage in mime.

Kids with this intelligence tend to learn well through movement games and dramatizing scenes and situations. Playing a game of hopscotch will help your physical learner grasp math concepts more easily than counting items. A good science experiment for a bodily-kinesthetic child is to compare how far he can throw different types of objects. Try to have dress-up clothes and props for role-playing, bean bags, and other age-appropriate sports equipment around the house.

### **Musical**

**What it is:** Sensitivity to pitch, melody, rhythm and tone. These children love to listen to and play music, sing, hum, move to the rhythm, and create and replicate tunes.

Singing songs and making audio tapes can be the best way to engage your child in activities. To teach your musical learner math concepts, have her count drum beats or make musical patterns with an instrument. Provide plenty of instruments to explore (including kitchen utensils to bang!), a tape recorder, and a variety of songs and sounds to listen to.

### **Spatial**

**What it is:** The ability to perceive the world accurately and to re-create or transform aspects of that world. These learners doodle, paint, draw and build with blocks. They also enjoy looking at maps, doing puzzles and mazes, and taking things apart and putting them back together.

Showing your child photos and pictures will help him grasp new information better than verbal explanations. To involve him in science experiments, ask him to draw his observations. Provide plenty of books with bright, bold graphics, as well as a variety of art materials for your child to explore.

### **Naturalist**

**What it is:** Recognizing and classifying the numerous species, the flora and fauna, of an environment. These kids like to spend time outdoors observing plants, collecting rocks and catching insects, and are attuned to relationships in nature.

When possible, use photos and books about animals and the natural world to explain topics. Going outside to observe concepts in action — cause and effect, for example — is the best way to teach a naturalist. A terrarium,

microscope and bird feeder are good items to offer your little naturalist.

### **Interpersonal**

**What it is:** Understanding people and relationships. These children have many friends and tend to mediate between them and be excellent team players.

Whenever possible, involve your child in group games and discussions. Turning a science experiment into an activity to do with friends can be the best way to engage an interpersonal learner. Your child will probably enjoy playing with puppets, dolls and small figures.

### **Intrapersonal**

**What it is:** The ability to use one's emotional life as a means to understand oneself and others. Children with this type of intelligence control their own feelings and moods and often observe and listen. They do best when working alone.

Encourage your child to think about how new experiences make him feel and offer him plenty of chances to explore topics on his own. To involve an intrapersonal learner in a science project, ask him to describe his experiences and emotions. A camera, drawing pad and blank journal can help your child record and think about his observations.