

The Way They Learn by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, M.Ed.

Communicating With Your Child's Teacher: A Student Profile

The following is based on information in *The Way They Learn* by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias. It is designed to be a guide for parents in describing each individual child's strengths and preferences to a teacher.

As you share this information with your child's teacher, remember, you are sharing what you know about your child and asking the teacher for insights that may aid you in helping your child understand, appreciate and cope with demands in the classroom that may or may not match his or her natural learning style. Whenever possible, fill out the following together with your child.

Child's Name _____ **Date** _____

Each line represents a continuum—place a mark somewhere between the extremes.

How do you best concentrate?

Seems most alert during which time(s) of day?

Early morning Late evening

When concentrating, even at play, needs or doesn't need some sort of intake (food or drink).

Needs to eat or drink Distracted by eating or drinking

Seems to be able to concentrate and play best in bright or dim light.

Bright light Dim light

Is almost always most comfortable doing homework in a formal, or informal, setting.

Formal (desk, table) Informal (floor, bed, sofa)

How do you best remember?

When trying to remember or review, is successful most often when he or she can:

Repeat the words aloud, drill verbally or turn the information into a song or rhyme.

Almost always Almost never

See a picture of what is meant, sketch out an idea, use colorful folders to organize.

Almost always Almost never

Keep on the move, take frequent breaks, work in spurts of great energy, shift positions

Almost always Almost never

How do you process and interact with information?

When listening to information or directions, usually seems to:

Get the gist of things, understand the main idea.

Almost always

Almost never

Remember specific details, can repeat things word for word.

Almost always

Almost never

When reading, often:

Reads quickly, skipping unfamiliar words; tends to choose fiction or personal interest.

Almost always

Almost never

Reads slowly and deliberately, reads every word, stops when there is an unfamiliar word; tends to choose subjects that can further knowledge, not much light reading.

Almost always

Almost never

When organizing, usually:

Works with piles, not files; spreads materials out over several areas; tends to procrastinate.

Almost always

Almost never

Works best with a structured schedule; needs a clear and efficient work space; needs to break larger projects into manageable parts.

Almost always

Almost never

How do you understand and communicate what you know?

When learning, is:

More interested in obvious facts than in hidden meanings.

Almost always

Almost never

Often interested in where a person got the facts.

Almost always

Almost never

Most interested in the background of the person giving the facts.

Almost always

Almost never

Mostly just interested in how much of the facts are really necessary.

Almost always

Almost never

On a day-to-day basis, prefers:

Having a parent or teacher provide predictable plans and routines.

Almost always Almost never

Designing his or her own schedules or routines.

Almost always Almost never

Knowing what will make everyone else happy.

Almost always Almost never

Doing whatever the inspiration of the moment dictates.

Almost always Almost never

When it comes to responding to authority figures, seems to especially need:

Clear and specific rules and expectations.

Almost always Almost never

Logical reasons for procedures and guidelines.

Almost always Almost never

Reassurance of personal worth despite making a mistake

Almost always Almost never

To feel that the person in authority respects and seeks input on the issues.

Almost always Almost never

When talking to your child's teacher, keep the following in mind:

1. Treat the teacher as the expert. Assume the best, and approach the teacher in a positive, upbeat way.
2. Let the teacher know what you have read about learning styles, and ask for his or her opinion. (Perhaps even loan the teacher a copy of *The Way They Learn!*) Ask the teacher to give you some ideas for further reading.
3. When discussing your child, start many of your questions with the same four words: "What can I do?" For example, "Jane's learning style is very different from your teaching style. I think it's great that she is learning how to deal with lots of different approaches. I'm wondering, though, what could I do to help her understand the way you teach? What could I do at home that might help her succeed better in your classroom?" Let the teacher know you and your child are taking the responsibility for learning and coping with the classroom demands.
4. Recognize that there are very practical limitations on what the teacher can do for your child. Try to make it as easy as possible for the teacher to accommodate your child's learning style while still meeting bottom-line outcomes. For example, if you have discovered that your child needs to follow a certain system for recording and keeping track of homework, you go ahead and make up the necessary assignment sheets so that the teacher would only need to fill in a couple blanks and sign the bottom.
5. Remember, every teacher is a lesson in learning for your child. The more variety he or she experiences in the classroom, the more opportunities your child will have to discover and develop natural style strengths and to use them to cope with uncomfortable style demands. Instead of resenting a different teaching approach, do your best to help your child understand and value a variety of methods. By helping children discover and appreciate their teachers' unique styles, you can prepare them to face a world of differences with the confidence of knowing they can use their strengths to cope with almost anything!

—Excerpted from *Every Child Can Succeed: Making the Most of Your Child's Learning Style* by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias.

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