

Bringing Out the Best in Your Child:

How Much is a Matter of Style?

By Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, M.Ed.

Every parent wants the best for their children. But how do you know what the best is? Why is each child so different? When I wrote my first book, *The Way They Learn*, I introduced the term learning styles—natural, inborn strengths and characteristics in each individual. Our learning style affects how we understand and organize information. It helps us decide what makes sense and what's important. As parents begin to really get to know each child, they realize just how unique and wonderful each of their children really is. They also recognize that many of the learning style traits in their children that were inconvenient or irritating are often signs of their greatest potential strengths.

Before you decide your child is actually trying to frustrate you, read the following descriptions for various learning style strengths. Could it be that the child whose actions irritate you the most is actually destined to be the most successful? Take a few moments to consider how many of these "inconvenient" behaviors can remind you that you truly have a great kid!

The child who seems to be constantly talking or making noise

For many auditory learners, talking is the only way to really think about what they are doing. Hearing themselves say the words helps them understand and remember. Their best problem-solving may be the result of talking through the whole process out loud. If you get tired of listening to a constant stream of chatter, try using a code word. Let them know you will give your undivided attention the moment they say that word. Remember, even the noise that seems utterly unnecessary to you may be helping your child think and learn. Hold him accountable for the bottom line, but consider letting him talk his way there!

The child who seems to be easily distracted, preferring imagination over reality

Many children have very active and visual imaginations. Often, when they look like they are not paying attention, they are trying to form a mental picture of what is being said. These children can have a great future in the areas where their visual strengths are most in demand—art, design, the theatre, just to name a few. Instead of being frustrated with their apparent inattention, try discovering ways to incorporate the distraction into the process of listening. Be sure you're helping them picture what you mean when you give them instructions, and encourage them to draw or write as they are learning in order to reinforce the visual strengths.

The child who is restless and very active; the one who won't sit still

If you have a child who constantly has excess energy to burn, there is cause to celebrate! As your child gets older, the ability to think and work on the move is a real





plus. Athletes, actors, mechanics, craftsmen—all these professionals have discovered how beneficial it is to be gifted with natural movement and energy. Instead of simply trying to force your active child to be still, try to direct the energy. For example, use that flight of stairs to practice spelling words or shoot hoops in the backyard while you talk about what will be on tomorrow's test. You may be amazed at how well the bottom-line task is accomplished—with or without staying in the same place to do it!

The child who can't seem to remember details or specifics

Not everyone was born with a naturally analytic mind. For many, the overall picture or general concept is much easier to grasp than the details. Of course, if your child is not analytic, school may often seem difficult and frustrating. It's important to recognize and reinforce the positive aspects of being more "global" or big-picture oriented. Your global child will be able to quickly and intuitively understand the main idea of a story or lesson. He or she will often know an answer without being able to explain or justify it. Global learners find it easier to connect ideas and see relationships than their more analytic counterparts. It often helps globals focus on necessary details if you will warn them in advance about what they will need to know. Notice and praise their ability to quickly

get to the heart of an issue and pull out the highlights. Help them recognize why the details are important in the first place—how they fit into the bigger picture.

The child who is a perfectionist and can't seem to think of anything but details

Some children are so focused on achievement that it seems like they never relax and just enjoy themselves. If you have a child who worries about getting every detail exactly right, be sure to encourage the conscientious nature that prompted the concern in the first place. Certainly the workplace can always use people who are careful and thorough, especially in professions that depend on accuracy and fine points. If you yourself are not a particularly detail-oriented parent, you may be frustrated by your child's more analytic nature, but it is important for both of you to keep your perspective. Ask your child what he needs in order to feel like he has enough information or materials to feel he can accomplish his task. Try to avoid saying things like, "Oh, don't worry about it." Look for situations where your child doesn't have to be quizzed about details—watching a movie or playing just for fun, for example. Be prepared for the fact that even when it's supposed to be fun, your perfectionist may still feel compelled to "pick it apart." Instead of fighting it, direct it by insisting the comments be positive and constructive.

An Important Reminder!

Children respond better to positive rewards, praise and encouragement than they do to threats, guilt or coercion. When parents really know and understand each child as an individual, they can find and use ways that truly motivate that child to succeed. Focus on the strengths—the traits in your children that will help them make their own unique contribution to the world. Sometimes in the middle of daily conflicts, pressures and frustration, it's hard to remember what you appreciate about the child who is being so inconvenient. So why not take a moment right now and start making a list of the strengths you see in each of your children? It won't take you long at all to discover you've got a great kid!

Cynthia Ulrich Tobias is Founder, Manager and CEO of AppLe St. (Applied Learning Styles). An internationally known speaker, she is author of several books including The Way They Learn, Every Child Can Succeed, Bringing Out the Best in Your Child, You Can't Make Me (But I Can be Persuaded), and her newest book, I Hate School! Visit Cynthia's Web site at www.Applest.com.

Do You Know Your Child's Love Language?

By Bob Fossum

“I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I’m not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.”¹

WHAT? If you’re like me, you probably had to review that sentence a couple of times in order to figure out what was being said. Communicating our thoughts with one another is a complicated process. There are times when I feel I have communicated so clearly that it would be impossible for anyone not to understand what I have just said . . . only to find a roomful of stares trying to figure out what planet I’ve come from!

Being able to clearly communicate love with another person becomes an even greater challenge. Dr. Gary Chapman in his book *The Five Love Languages* has discovered that each of us speaks our own “love language”—the different ways we express love to and appreciate receiving love from others. His research shows that we tend to speak and receive love in one of the following primary ways: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch.

But how do we learn to communicate love to our children in a way that fills their emotional need for affirmation? That begins with discovering what your child’s love language is. Dr. Chapman suggests following these guidelines in his best-seller, *The Five Love Languages of Children* (Moody, 1997):

■ **Observe how your child expresses love to you.** Our tendency is to speak to others in the language that is most significant to us. Chances are your child speaks to others in the love language that they most enjoy receiving. Let their expressions of love to you be a clue as to their love language.

■ **Observe how your child expresses love to others.** Spend some time watching your child as they play with other children. Note especially how your child shows appreciation to others. That expression will be a clue to what their love language is.

■ **Listen to what your child requests most often.** Kids can be pretty relentless. If you learn to listen “between the lines” to the things your child is requesting, you may hear his or her primary love language.

■ **Listen to your child’s most frequent complaints.** All children’s behavior is motivated by a need. However, they may not be able to articulate their feelings in appropriate ways. By asking yourself, “What need is



prompting this complaint?” you may discover their love language in their cry.

■ **Give your child a choice between two options.** The choice they make between two love languages will most likely be their primary love language. Pay attention to this and remember it for the future.

Becoming a student of your child so as to discover his or her love language is only half of the story. Practice speaking their love language and you will communicate love to them in a way that satisfies their emotional need for affirmation—and they will love you for it.

¹ This quote is attributed to Robert McClosky, an American author and illustrator of children’s books.

Bob Fossum is a Family Minister at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Aloha, Oregon.

YOU-NIQUELY CREATED



By Robin Fossum

You are a unique wonderful work, distinctly and personally fashioned by your Creator. The biblical writer of the Psalms poetically records this declaration in his address to the Creator God:

For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . . All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:13-14,16).

It is no wonder at all that children growing up in the same family can resemble each other about as much as a Red Delicious apple tastes like a Granny Smith—they may grow from similar looking seeds, but each presents a radically different taste. In this instance, becoming a student of your child means seeking to understand his or her unique personality—why one child prefers the fun stuff of life while his brother has a built-in need to be in charge; why your oldest has a passion for doing things right, while her sister needs to be right with people; why you butt heads with one child while easily relate to another. Equipped with this insight, parents can guide each child according to the traits God has wired into them, helping them to engage their world through the constructive exercise of these characteristics.

In their book, *Taming The Family Zoo: Maximizing Harmony and Minimizing Family Stress*, Jim and Suzette Brawner offer one framework for understanding basic personality types that enables parents to adjust their parenting style to fit each child's unique personality

and guide them accordingly. Adapted from a concept developed by Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent, *Taming The Family Zoo* presents a simple process for discovering if your child is a fun-loving otter, a take-charge lion, a detail-oriented beaver, or a compassionate golden retriever.

A personality bent toward beaverish organization and detail planning can be easily frustrated by the spontaneity of the free-spirited otter whose life motto is "Lighten up!" Of course, this works both ways. Most families resemble a zoo of these differing personalities. Parents aware of their child's style can teach them to respect rather than scorn these differences. Since each style has inherent strengths and weaknesses, parents who have become a student of their child's personality can also nurture and redirect these respectively.

Investment in understanding your child's personality will pay-off in positive development of their abilities and skills for a lifetime. Remarkably, you will also reap the benefit of a more enjoyable relationship with your child.

Robin Fossum is a Family Minister in Oregon and editor of Home Base.



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