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Child > Learning & Education

# The physical learner

By Jhoanna Robledo

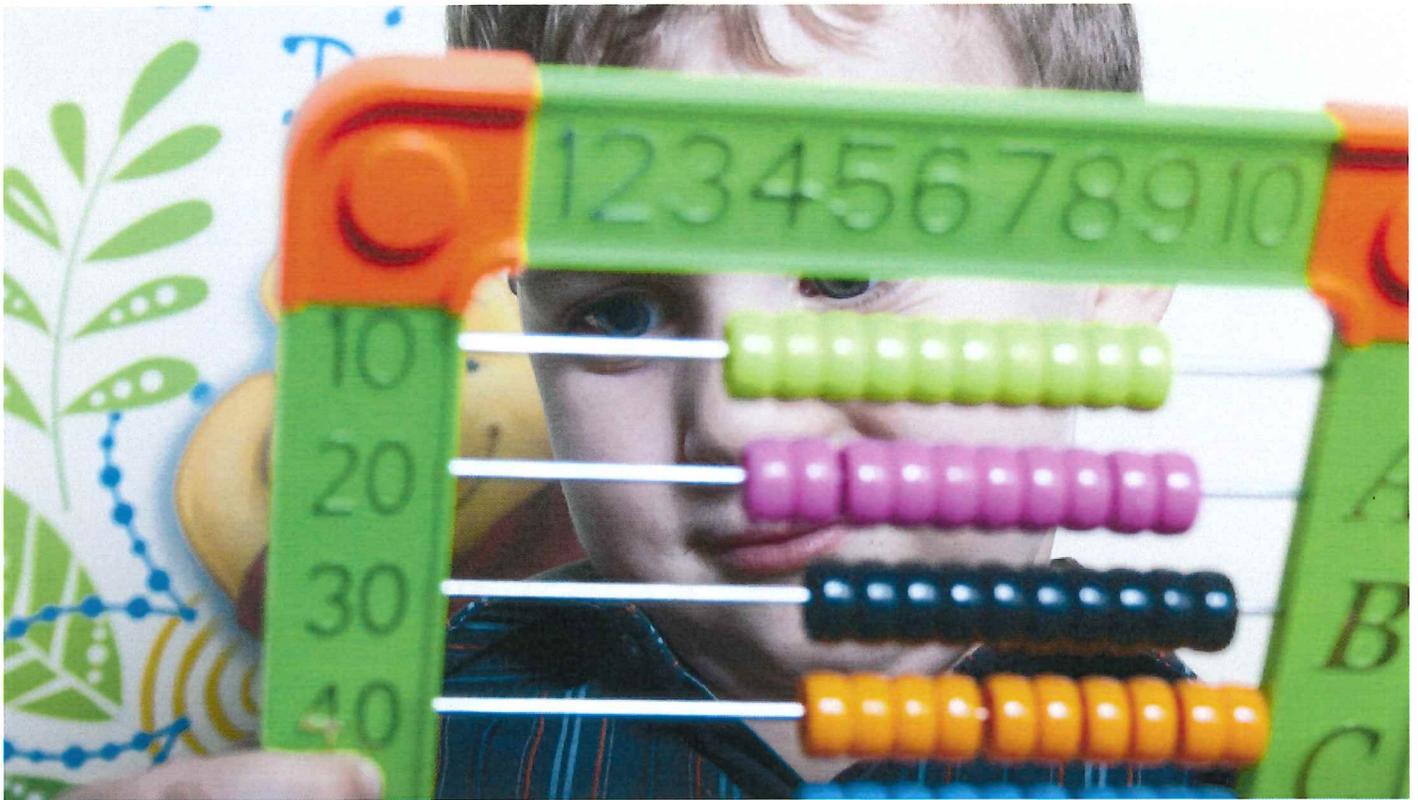


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Physical learners (also known as "tactual-kinesthetic learners" – "tactual" for touch, "kinesthetic" for movement) discover the world best when they're using their hands or bodies. In some ways, all children are natural physical learners. As babies, they rely on their sense of touch to grasp new ideas and concepts. Remember how yours discovered his toes – and almost every other body part – by putting them in his mouth? By the time children reach preschool or kindergarten, many have begun to adopt other learning styles, but some children maintain a strong affinity for physical learning.

While many physical learners are both tactual and kinesthetic, some are decidedly one or the other. If your child prefers to feel things in his hands, he's primarily tactual. These are the kids who enjoy hands-on activities, such as cutting construction paper to make collages and fiddling with beads and other objects when learning how to count.

If your child learns best by immersing himself in a physical activity, he's kinesthetic. These kids like to move and get their whole body involved in activities. Your child is probably kinesthetic if he is very expressive, he likes to act out stories with his whole body, wiggle, dance, and move his arms or if he jumps around a lot even while listening to you.

## What are the benefits of knowing my child's learning style?

Knowing how your child likes to learn and process information is an invaluable tool that you can use to help him do better in school and develop a love of learning. Education experts have identified three main types of learners – physical, visual, and auditory. Understanding that your child is a physical learner (though his style may shift over time), and therefore most comfortable using touch and movement to explore the world, can help you play to that strength and work on the other learning styles – auditory and visual – that need more stimulation.

When learning about counting, for example, a physical learner may need to use blocks, an abacus, or other concrete materials to practice the new concept. A visual learner will grasp the material more quickly by watching his teacher solve a problem in front of him. An auditory learner will remember the information if he can listen to the teacher explain it and answer his questions.



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Styles at St. John's University in Jamaica, N.Y., and the evidence is compelling. Two elementary schools in North Carolina increased the achievement test scores of students from the 30th percentile to the 83rd percentile over a three-year period. And in 1992, the U.S. Department of Education found that attending to a child's learning style was one of the few strategies that improved achievement of special education students on national tests.

## What can I do to help my physical child excel at preschool and kindergarten?

The best way to support your physical child is to indulge his need for activities that allow him to use his hands and body to explore. "Pay attention to activities your child enjoys, and try to approach learning from that point," says Kurt Fischer, director of Mind, Brain, and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. So if your child prefers to use art supplies or play with LEGOs to learn about shapes and colors, go with his flow. If he tends to count using his fingers, let him. And if he enjoys stories when you act them out with him, encourage his dramatic side. For more activities your physical child may enjoy, see:

- Activities for a [prereader](#)
- Activities to promote a preschooler's [math skills](#)
- Activities to promote a preschooler's [writing skills](#)
- Activities to promote a preschooler's [listening skills](#)
- Activities to promote a preschooler's [speaking skills](#)

## How can I address my physical child's weaknesses in other areas?

First, try not to think of your child's learning style preference as a liability. If your child is primarily physical but not auditory or visual, he's not necessarily doomed to have problems in school. Learning styles aren't set in stone – your child will adopt other styles as he grows older and develops new skills. "Learning is complex," says Barbara Given,



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While it's important to provide your child with many opportunities to engage in physical activities, Given says pay attention to the other learning styles, too. "It's crucial that parents work with multiple senses as well, so the child can become well rounded and use various strategies to grasp new information," she says. To help boost his visual skills, play memory and concentration card games with him, or play music for him to strengthen his auditory skills.

Also teach him how to compensate for his lack of strength in the other learning styles. Physical learners may have trouble in areas where listening and visual skills are required. If he's learning the difference between a square and a rectangle, for example, let him hold three-dimensional shapes in his hands so he can feel how they each have a unique form. If he can't remember a song, show him how to use his body to act out parts of the tune (for example, instead of just singing "I'm a little teapot short and stout," he can use his arms to make the shape of a teapot). You should also consider talking to his teacher about ways he can channel his energy in class without being disruptive, and explain how he needs physical cues for any information presented orally or visually.

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## Where can I get more information about learning styles?

See the following articles:

[The auditory learner](#)

[The visual learner](#)

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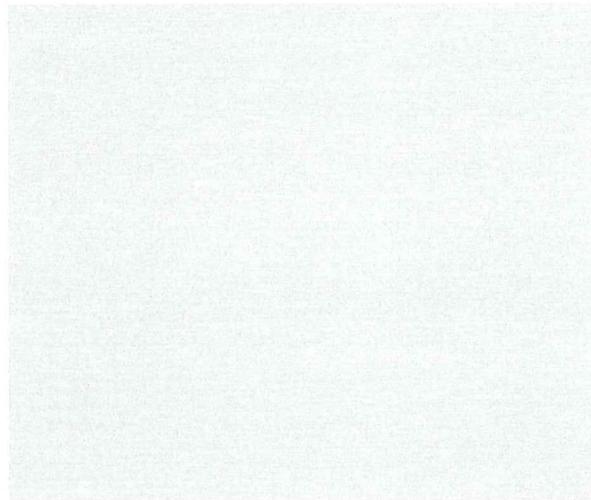


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