

Staying Awake During Lectures by Keeping The Right Hemisphere in the Game

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Do you ever wonder why learning, in the traditional sense (like how your children are probably now taught at school), in a step-by-step manner where each new bit of information builds on the last, is difficult for your visual-spatial children? Maybe it isn't, but for many visual-spatial learners (VSLs), it's as though the really challenging material is actually quite easy, but what others in the class consider very simple material is quite difficult. This is because higher level, challenging material engages the right hemisphere of their brain. When they get to something that's new and interesting, it's as though all of a sudden the right side of the brain is charged and ready to go! They really can't tune out or doze off if what they are learning is interesting, funny or challenging. The right hemisphere has to stay in the act, and it's happy to do so! But, the minute the learning becomes boring, rote, dry, or strictly auditory, your kids might as well get out a pillow and fall asleep along with their right hemisphere! I've got some good news and some not-so-good news for you to share with your children.

Here's the not-so-good news first: There will be some class or college lecture or boss or *somebody* that they absolutely must pay attention to no matter how incredibly boring. Their grade or raise or job will depend on it. It's nearly impossible to avoid such a situation. It's bound to happen.

The good news is: They are in charge of their right hemisphere! They decide whether it's nap-time or time to wake up and get in the game. The right hemisphere wants something more to do than just hold up the other side of the brain—give it an opportunity! Even if your kids are participating in the most boring, auditory lecture of their lives, they can do something to activate that part of the brain that just wants to zone out. Here's how:

- Start by taking notes in pictures of what is being said. Even if they don't need the notes, just draw images of what the speaker is discussing. These don't have to be elaborate or even artistic; your kids just need to get involved in really hearing the words so they can create matching images.
- Use markers for notes, whether they're taking notes in pictures or words. They should use a different color each time a new bit of information is introduced in the lecture or each time a different subject is mentioned. The right hemisphere thrives on color so show them how to use it! It will even help them to recall their notes (as images) if they are quizzed later on the material.
- Try doodling to keep focused, even if the doodles don't have anything to do with what they are listening to. Draw the speaker in his underwear, for heaven's sake! The point is to stay focused on the auditory information.
- Take a small object to manipulate while listening. A hackey sack might work, or a balloon filled with flour (and tightly sealed!), or any other stress reliever manipulative they can find. They cannot allow it to distract them from concentrating on the words of the lecture, though, or they will have that object taken away.
- If your kids know they are going to be subjected to a strictly auditory lecture, have them ask the teacher, speaker, or presenter for an overview first. Visual-spatial learners prefer big picture information first; teach them to advocate for themselves and ask for that big picture. Then, as they're listening to the details, they'll know where the talk is headed. They can even take notes (in words or pictures) in the margins of the overview, filling in details from what the speaker says to match the outline of what was provided.
- Show your children how to stay on top of the lecture by trying to predict where the speaker is going. What is the point? What are the important facts? If your kids were required to stand up and quiz the rest of the class, what would they include on the test? You can do this by reading stories together and having your children predict various outcomes or endings and quickly review the highlights of what has already been read.

I hope these tips help you in showing your visual-spatial children how to engage the right hemisphere of their brains so that learning is fun and can become permanent. Perhaps you can share them with your children's teachers too, so that classroom instruction is meaningful and memorable.

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