

Visit With the Utays

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School Psychology and Education Specialists



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Another Memory Key: Teach Mnemonic Thinking

"Memory is imagination pinned down" explained Mason Cooley, author of sayings in which he condensed much thought into a few words. In this one, he masterfully briefly summarized the close relationship between memory and imagination. Continuing our series on imaginative ways to help children strengthen their memory, using mnemonics or "mnemonic devices" is the topic this month. Most adults know about and use mnemonics – memory triggers – at least occasionally. Even if your child has already been exposed to mnemonics, like ROY G. BIV for the colors of the rainbow (red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet), it will take some encouragement and practice for it to become automatic. The goal is for your child to eventually independently create and use a mnemonic: "Hey, the first letter of each of those names I have to memorize spells TED."

However, don't let your child get away with just using the first letter of words as the only memory "trick." Tony Buzan has written popular books about useful ways of remembering such as the use of peg lists, mind maps, and mnemonics. Be creative with helping your child make connections between whatever needs memorizing and images (including funny pictures), colors, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, feelings, other languages, or even common objects. More multisensory connection means better memory.

The following are some additional tips on making the most of mnemonic approaches:

1. Create positive associations. The brain tends to block out unpleasant images.

2. Ever say to yourself, "I'll probably forget that," and then you did? Simply changing that to, "I will remember this" will strengthen memory.
3. Connect what is to be memorized with images, sounds, etc. most familiar to your child.
4. Rehearse what is to be memorized out loud. Even better, sing the items in a consistent rhythm so that remembering the tune or rhythm will trigger the rest of the memory.
5. Draw it. For example, draw the white house with three windows and a door. Then, write the names of the three branches of congress on each window and the president's name on the door.
6. Teach it to someone else.
7. Change dates into times so the year 515 becomes 5:15.

Author Amy Tan wrote, "Memory feeds imagination," once again reminding us that our imagination needs our memories as much as our memory often depends on our imagination, if we let it. But, if mnemonics and other creative approaches to helping your child strengthen his or her memory are not making a substantial difference in achievement or grades, consider community resources. Total Learning Centers offer an effective program consisting of a series of challenging brain building exercises to build up the "muscles" responsible for memory.

As always, for more information about this or any other topic related to your child's success, including professional assessment of strengths and needs, contact Total Learning Centers at 724-940-1090 (Wexford, Fox Chapel, and Murrysville areas).