

Visit With the Utays

School Psychology and Education Specialists

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5 Ways to Improve Children's Memories

Better Memories, Better Grades

It's easy for adults to forget how stressful memorizing is for kids in school. Samuel Butler may have put it a bit strongly 100 or so years ago: "Memory and forgetfulness are as life and death to one another. To live is to remember and to remember is to live. To die is to forget and to forget is to die." Still, memorizing is one of the most stressful school requirements children face.

Fortunately, many powerful memory aids have been developed such as, associating what is to be memorized with numbers or familiar objects, spaced repetition in brief but repeated chunks of time, and using acronyms. Space limits a complete list here, but give each of the following additional parent-tested memory boosters a try to check their fit for your child's specific situation.

1. Paying Attention, with Interest

Having lived through every decade of the 1800s, Tyron Edwards had plenty of opportunity to learn a about what it took to develop a good memory: "The secret of a good memory is attention, and attention to a subject depends upon our interest in it. We rarely forget that which has made a deep impression on our minds." This was not a new idea, even back then. 300 years before Edwards was born, Leonardo da Vinci commented on the need to be passionate about what you learn in order to really remember it: "Study without desire spoils the memory, and it retains nothing that it takes in." So, make sure 1) attention is on whatever is being studied and 2) some interest (if not actual zeal) is recognized and encouraged.

2. Imagine That!

You don't have to have a brain surgeon's knowledge of the brain's visual cortex to understand, "One picture is worth a thousand words." Most people's visual memory is stronger than their verbal memory. For children studying for a test, it can make a huge difference to invest the time to create a visual hint or clue to turbo-boost a memory. It works

the other way around too in that developing ones memory helps expand imagination. As the Irish poet and novelist Patrick Kavanagh put it, “On the stem of memory imaginations blossom.”

3. Simplify, Simplify About 250 years ago, Samuel Johnson gave great advice about how to memorize important information: “He is a benefactor of mankind who contracts the great rules of life into short sentences that may be easily impressed on the memory, and so recur habitually to the mind.” Teachers try to help simplify material when they can. However, they are more pressed than ever to fit in an ever-growing body of material. So, instead of reviewing the same complex information over and over in one large chunk, create short simple questions with short simple answers. The brain likes simple!

4. Get the Big Picture

Trying to memorize information before first getting a good overall understanding of the topic is like putting together a puzzle without first seeing a picture of the finished image. It can be done, but what a waist of precious time and brain power! An often overlooked key to helping children memorize information is to start with helping them understand how all the information fits together. This actually helps the brain remember the individual bits of information later. Heaped in a pile, bricks are still bricks (like important bits of information); they just don’t serve the purpose nearly as well as when put together in a cohesive way.

5. Bulk up the Brain

Another way to improve memory is to have children strengthen the neural connections in their brain in order to then **automatically** remember better. Strengthening the “memory muscle” is accomplished through a series of fun challenging brain exercises packaged in a program called Processing and Cognitive Enhancement (PACE). In our community, Total Learning Centers offer such a program which is quite effective for improving memory, thinking speed, attention, and other aspects of what scientists refer to as the executive functioning of the brain. Unlike the previous memory tips, this approach requires a professionally trained PACE instructor leading the child through the entertaining exercises. Kids enjoy the process, especially when they begin to notice their increased ability to remember.

When Albert Schweitzer wrote, “Happiness is nothing more than good health and a bad memory,” he certainly was not describing any happy school age child we’ve ever met. In school, memory is good and better memory is better. Many school, social, and family frustrations can be prevented, or at least helped, with a better memory. The question is not if but how to increase a particular child’s ability to remember the hugely increased amount of information required by today’s schools. Feel free to call TLC to discuss your own child’s unique situation and needs (724-940-1090).

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