WHY YOUR CHILD FORGETS WHAT THEY LEARN AT SCHOOL AND HOW YOU CAN HELP THEM REMEMBER

September 2025 by Mohammed Yafai and Megan Hodgson

PICTURE THIS

Your child bursts through the door after school, brimming with excitement. They have just had a fantastic science lesson exploring forces, or perhaps they've delved into a gripping scene in Macbeth.

At the dinner table, they explain it confidently and answer every question. You feel proud and reassured that they have learnt these topics well.

Fast forward a few weeks. The end-of-unit test arrives, and the results surprise you.

Information that once seemed so secure is now difficult to recall, and your child might even say, "I don't remember learning that."

Sound familiar?

PERFORMANCE VS LEARNING

Performance vs learning
This is where it helps to know the difference between performance and learning.

Performance is what your child can do right now, immediately after learning.

Learning is what they can still do later, after time has passed and forgetting has had a chance to set in.

True learning is a change in long-term memory.

LOSING AND STORING INFORMATION

To understand why forgetting happens, it helps to know a little about how memory works.

Your child's working memory is where thinking happens and new information is first held, but it's limited and can only handle a few items at once.

For learning to last, that new information must be processed and stored in long-term memory, which is vast and effectively unlimited. Recall brings it back into working memory, but if the connection isn't strong, retrieval is hard and learning feels lost.

WHY DO CHILDREN (AND ADULTS!) FORGET?

Research shows much new information is forgotten within days. Early theorists blamed the passing of time, while later research points to interference - the way new learning connects, or fails to connect, to prior knowledge. Linked ideas are remembered more easily, disconnected ones fade faster. Whatever the cause, if your child doesn't revisit new learning, it will fade.
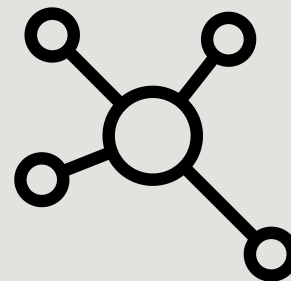
HOW WE CAN HELP

At Project Yalla Learn, our tutors specialise in turning short-term performance into long-term mastery. Our experienced, UK-qualified teachers, many of whom hold leadership roles in teaching and learning and curriculum design, offer online one-to-one and group tutoring for Primary, Secondary, and A-Level students.

We know that real learning lasts long after the lesson ends, and our approach draws on a wide range of evidence from cognitive science. To help our students retain knowledge long- term, we prioritise these three proven strategies in our tutoring sessions:

1. Retrieval Practice: regularly recalling information to strengthen memory, for example through quizzes or low-stakes tests.

2. Spaced Practice: revisiting a topic over time, rather than cramming in one go, to improve retention.

3. Interleaving: mixing different topics or problem types to encourage deeper thinking and build flexible understanding.

HOW TO REVISE

When revising independently, students often start with familiar strategies like re-reading notes or highlighting pages. While these can feel helpful at first, we encourage our tutees to move beyond them and adopt proven tools and techniques such as knowledge organisers, flashcards, and self-quizzing - methods that promote active engagement and help learning stick.

PROJECT YALLA LEARN

Our name, Yalla - an Arabic expression meaning "come on" or "let's go"- captures our promise to walk alongside your child, encouraging them every step and inspiring a genuine love of learning.

So, Yalla - here's to evidence-informed learning that lasts!

To hear more or book a free consultation, please visit us at projectyalla.com or email info@projectyalla.com.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Read:
A model for the learning process and why it helps to have one by Tom Sherrington

Why The Forgetting Curve Is Not As Useful As You Think by Carl Hendrick

Purchase:
Flashcards

Knowledge Organiser for KS3 Science

Book:
Free 30 minute consultation

Group Classes