

Tips for Teaching Adults

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Teaching adults presents unique challenges and rewards. Here are several important features of adult education:

1. **Mutual trust and respect:** Be patient, receptive and approachable. Be a student advocate. Provide all the information the student will need. Help make the student feel secure in the new environment. Prepare them for unit routines and expectations.
2. **Individualized learning:** Base content on the perceived needs of the student. Allow the student to set the pace of learning. Engage the student in mutual goal setting. Students learn well from watching others, participating in care, and developing her/his own learning plan. Allow the student to make choices and be self-directed.
3. **Shared learning and reciprocity:** Work as a team and relate as colleagues. A preceptor who views her/his role as a facilitator of learning helps make adult learners feel more comfortable.
4. **Safe, supportive and friendly environment:** Adults need to feel they will not be embarrassed, made to feel inadequate or intimidated in any way. Provide frequent positive reinforcement. Watch without taking over, be non-judgmental, and plan for success. Because learning can be mentally and physically exhausting, allow the student some free time when the occasion arises as a reward for hard work and good performance.
5. **Active learning:** Encourage learners to participate actively in the learning process. Engage students in dialogue about care and procedures. Reaffirm the student's knowledge and skills by explaining why certain actions are taken as well as how. Show the student available resources, such as procedural manuals and reference texts.
6. **Prior learning:** Make use of the student's prior experience and knowledge by finding out what they already know and what experiences they have had, and then anchoring new learning in these past experiences. Valuing the student's skills and knowledge recognizes past accomplishments and helps ease this difficult and often humbling transition in adult education. Even if the previous experiences are not care related, there may be a transfer of skills. For example, link past experience in waitressing and time management or multitasking.
7. **Feedback:** Give frequent, clear feedback so the student knows how s/he is progressing towards her/his goals.
8. **Organization and repetition:** Repeat content over time and sequence it in a logical fashion. Use a variety of teaching methods if possible. For example, reading about a procedure, watching a procedure, assisting with a procedure and actually doing the procedure are all different ways of teaching and can be used in combination with each other.

Sources: Baltimore, 2004; Clay et al., 1999; Trevitt, Grealish & Reaby, 2001; Rush, Peel & McCracken, 2004; Hohler, 2003

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