

Principles of Adult Learning

The Principles of Adult Learning section was adapted from the Trainer's Guide for Cancer Education by the National Cancer Institute. For more information, please see: www.cancer.gov.

In order to design and deliver an effective educational session, it is essential for the facilitator to have a thorough understanding of how adults learn and a range of teaching methods to meet each participant's learning preferences.

Adults learn differently from children because they bring a vast array of experience to the educational session. Adults are all at different stages of life; they have already developed their individual strengths, and have a range of learning experiences behind them.

There are some common features among adult learners.

Adult learners...

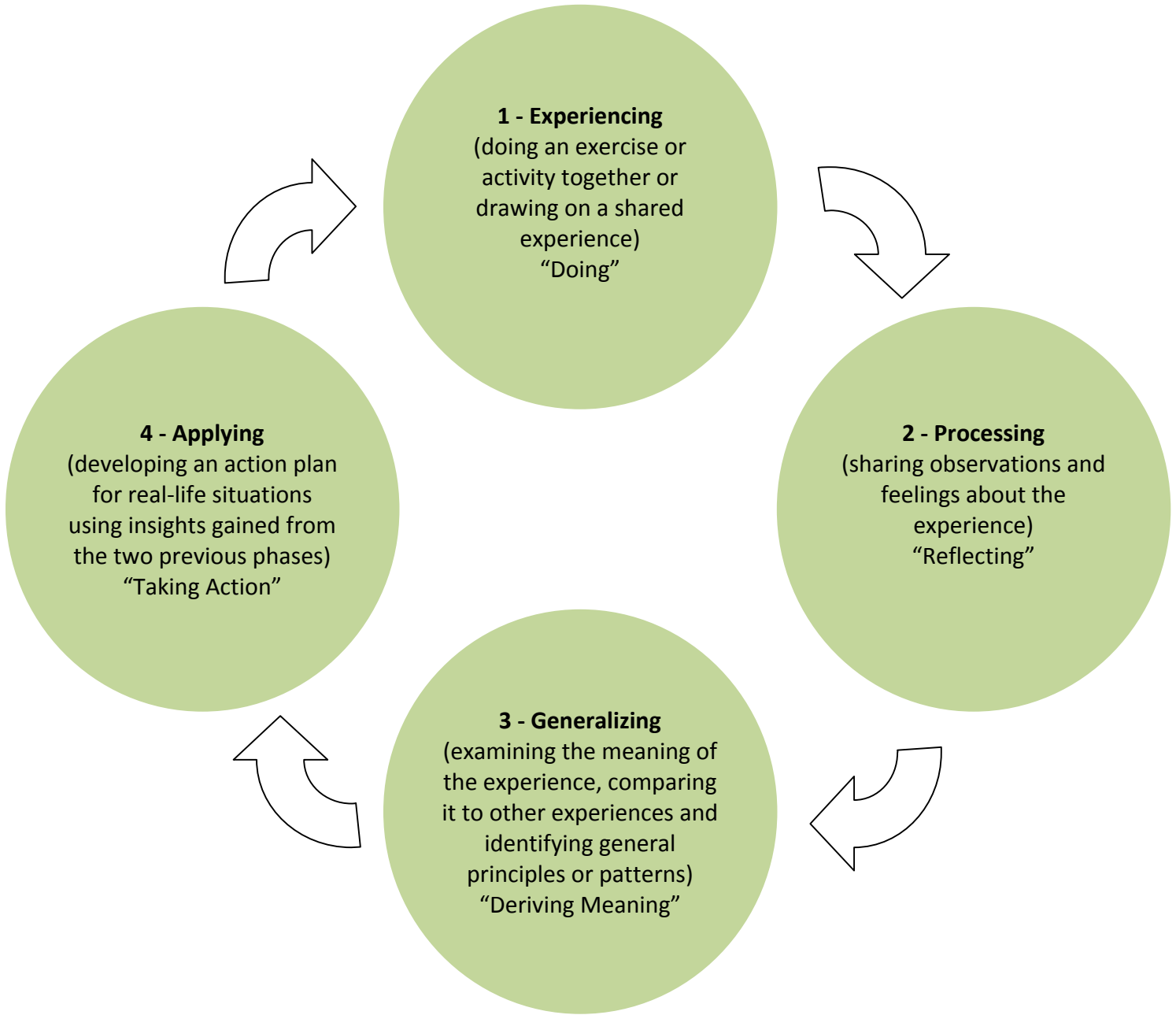
- have a wide range of knowledge and experience
- need to validate the information from the perspective of their values and attitudes
- are responsible - so let them set goals and help plan
- need to decide for themselves what is important to learn
- expect what they are learning can be applied immediately
- want to be actively involved in their learning
- need practice and reinforcement
- need to see the relevance
- like to challenge and reflect on ideas
- have increased powers of comprehension
- need to feel confident in the learning environment

Facilitator Notes: _____

Using the Adult Learning Cycle

Experiential learning occurs when a participant engages in some activity, looks back at the activity critically, draws some useful insight from this analysis, and puts the result to work. We all experience this process spontaneously in everyday life.

The Adult Learning Cycle provides a framework to help facilitate this process. The stages of the cycle are listed below.



Applying the Adult Learning Cycle to an Educational Session

Let's look at how a facilitator might move participants through this cycle during an educational session.

Once the facilitator has done introductions and established the ground rules, he or she can move through the adult learning cycle.



Different Learning Styles

Facilitators must be aware that in any audience the participants will learn in different ways:

For participants who	Method
Learn best while observing others	Demonstrations and videos
Learn best through interaction	Role playing and other experiential activities
Learn best through visual means	Videos, images, and slides

Facilitators must choose educational methods that address participants' different learning styles in order to help participants gain new awareness and information that will translate into changes in attitudes and behavior. A variety of educational strategies will ensure that the learning needs of all types of participants are met. The following table provides a description of some of the more common educational methods and their uses, advantages and disadvantages.

Facilitator Notes: _____

Method	Description	Uses	Advantages	Disadvantages
Presentation	A presentation can convey information, theories, or principles quickly and easily. Presentations can range from a straight lecture to some involvement of the participants through questions and discussion. Presentations depend on the facilitator for content more than any other method does.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces participants to a new subject • Provides an overview or a synthesis • Conveys facts or statistics • Addresses a large group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers a lot of material in a short time • Works with large groups • Provides context for more practical or hands-on activities • Gives facilitator more control than in other educational situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes one-way communication • Is not experiential in approach • Requires that participants take passive role in their learning • Requires that facilitator possess skills as an effective presenter • Is not appropriate for changing behavior or for learning skills • Limits participant retention unless it is followed up with a more practical technique
Small Group Discussions	An activity that allows participants to share their experiences and ideas or to solve a problem. It exposes participants to a variety of perspectives and experiences as they work together to accomplish the task.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables participants to present their ideas in a small group • Enhances problem-solving skills • Helps participants learn from each other • Gives participants a greater sense of responsibility in the learning process • Promotes teamwork • Clarifies personal values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows participants to develop greater control over their learning • Encourages participants to be less dependent on the facilitator • Encourages shy or less talkative participants to become involved • Allows for reinforcement and clarification of the lesson through discussion • Builds group cohesion • Elicits information from participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes time to move people into groups • Compromises quality control if a facilitator is not in each small group

Method	Description	Uses	Advantages	Disadvantages
Brainstorming	Brainstorming is an activity that generates a list of ideas, thoughts, or alternative solutions around a particular theme or topic. No idea is dismissed or criticized; anything offered is written down. Often participants stimulate each other's thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces a problem or question (e.g., "Let's brainstorm all the reasons women might be reluctant to return for follow-up after an abnormal pap result.") • Forms the basis of discussion • Can use in conjunction with group discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates ideas and leads to discussion quickly • Allows everyone's ideas to be expressed and validated without judgment • Generates energy to move forward with problem solving • Stimulates thought and creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to get participants to follow the rules of not diminishing or criticizing the ideas generated during the actual brainstorming activity • Affords opportunity for participants to get off track and develop a list too broad to guide discussion • Opens up the possibility that participants may feel badly if their idea meets with criticism • Requires that participants have some background related to the topic
Demonstration	A demonstration is a method for showing precisely how a skill, task, or technique should be done. The facilitator or a skilled participant shows other participants how to successfully perform a given task by demonstrating it, describing each step, and explaining the reasons for performing it in a particular way. It is often followed by a practice session in which the participants carry out the activity under the supervision of the facilitator. The use of props can greatly enhance a session.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show participants how to perform a skill (e.g., showing community members how to use the collection kit for a fecal occult blood test) • Clarifies and corrects misconceptions about how to perform a task • Shows how participants can improve or develop skills • Models a step-by-step approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides learning experience based on actual performance and is relevant to the participant's job or personal experience, especially when combined with hands-on practice • Illustrates processes, ideas, and relationships in a clear and direct manner • Helps participants' focus their attention • Involves participants when they try the method themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited usefulness • Requires a lot of planning and practice ahead of time • Requires facilities and seating arrangements that are carefully planned so all members of the audience have an unobstructed view • Requires enough materials for everyone to try the skill being demonstrated • Does not ensure that participants will immediately be able to duplicate the skill being demonstrated after seeing it demonstrated • Requires that participants take passive role during demonstrations which may cause them to lose interest, particularly toward the end of the session

Method	Description	Uses	Advantages	Disadvantages
Role Play	<p>Role play is a technique in which several individuals or a small group of participants act out a real-life situation in front of the group. Facilitators can provide role play scripts or have participants make up their parts as the situation unfolds. The role play should be discussed in relation to the situation or problem under consideration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps change participants' attitudes • Enables participants to see the consequences of their actions • Provides examples of possible reactions or behaviors • Provides a safe environment for exploring problems they may feel uncomfortable discussing in real life • Enables participants to explore alternative approaches to various situations • Explores possible solutions to emotion-laden problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides opportunity for stimulating new ideas while having fun • Engages the group's attention • Simulates the real world • Provides a dramatic way of presenting a problem and stimulating a discussion • Allows participants to assume the personality of another human being (to think and act as another might) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires that participants feel comfortable being in front of a group (some participants may feel self-conscious, shy, or may fear looking "ridiculous") • Requires dyads or triads in which everyone is either acting or observing to address participant reluctance

Facilitator Notes: _____

Assisting Participants in Being Comfortable with the Learning Process

We learn and remember more when we feel comfortable with the learning process. As a facilitator, one of your primary tasks is to create a comfortable place for learning to take place. Learning about cancer can be difficult for many people.

Some Issues that Hinder Learning

- Fear of discovering that one has a high risk of cancer.
- Fear of exposing one's lack of knowledge to others.
- Fear of remembering painful memories of loved ones lost to cancer.

Other issues can include differences in learning styles and cultural beliefs and perspectives. At the beginning of your session, you can reassure participants that these feelings are normal.

Facilitator Notes: _____

Method	Description	Uses	Advantages	Disadvantages
Presentation	A presentation can convey information, theories, or principles quickly and easily. Presentations can range from a straight lecture to some involvement of the participants through questions and discussion. Presentations depend on the facilitator for content more than any other method does.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces participants to a new subject • Provides an overview or a synthesis • Conveys facts or statistics • Addresses a large group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers a lot of material in a short time • Works with large groups • Provides context for more practical or hands-on activities • Gives facilitator more control than in other educational situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes one-way communication • Is not experiential in approach • Requires that participants take passive role in their learning • Requires that facilitator possess skills as an effective presenter • Is not appropriate for changing behavior or for learning skills • Limits participant retention unless it is followed up with a more practical technique
Small Group Discussions	An activity that allows participants to share their experiences and ideas or to solve a problem. It exposes participants to a variety of perspectives and experiences as they work together to accomplish the task.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables participants to present their ideas in a small group • Enhances problem-solving skills • Helps participants learn from each other • Gives participants a greater sense of responsibility in the learning process • Promotes teamwork • Clarifies personal values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows participants to develop greater control over their learning • Encourages participants to be less dependent on the facilitator • Encourages shy or less talkative participants to become involved • Allows for reinforcement and clarification of the lesson through discussion • Builds group cohesion • Elicits information from participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes time to move people into groups • Compromises quality control if a facilitator is not in each small group

Method	Description	Uses	Advantages	Disadvantages
Brainstorming	Brainstorming is an activity that generates a list of ideas, thoughts, or alternative solutions around a particular theme or topic. No idea is dismissed or criticized; anything offered is written down. Often participants stimulate each other's thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces a problem or question (e.g., "Let's brainstorm all the reasons women might be reluctant to return for follow-up after an abnormal pap result.") • Forms the basis of discussion • Can use in conjunction with group discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates ideas and leads to discussion quickly • Allows everyone's ideas to be expressed and validated without judgment • Generates energy to move forward with problem solving • Stimulates thought and creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to get participants to follow the rules of not diminishing or criticizing the ideas generated during the actual brainstorming activity • Affords opportunity for participants to get off track and develop a list too broad to guide discussion • Opens up the possibility that participants may feel badly if their idea meets with criticism • Requires that participants have some background related to the topic
Demonstration	A demonstration is a method for showing precisely how a skill, task, or technique should be done. The facilitator or a skilled participant shows other participants how to successfully perform a given task by demonstrating it, describing each step, and explaining the reasons for performing it in a particular way. It is often followed by a practice session in which the participants carry out the activity under the supervision of the facilitator. The use of props can greatly enhance a session.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show participants how to perform a skill (e.g., showing community members how to use the collection kit for a fecal occult blood test) • Clarifies and corrects misconceptions about how to perform a task • Shows how participants can improve or develop skills • Models a step-by-step approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides learning experience based on actual performance and is relevant to the participant's job or personal experience, especially when combined with hands-on practice • Illustrates processes, ideas, and relationships in a clear and direct manner • Helps participants' focus their attention • Involves participants when they try the method themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited usefulness • Requires a lot of planning and practice ahead of time • Requires facilities and seating arrangements that are carefully planned so all members of the audience have an unobstructed view • Requires enough materials for everyone to try the skill being demonstrated • Does not ensure that participants will immediately be able to duplicate the skill being demonstrated after seeing it demonstrated • Requires that participants take passive role during demonstrations which may cause them to lose interest, particularly toward the end of the session

Method	Description	Uses	Advantages	Disadvantages
Role Play	<p>Role play is a technique in which several individuals or a small group of participants act out a real-life situation in front of the group. Facilitators can provide role play scripts or have participants make up their parts as the situation unfolds. The role play should be discussed in relation to the situation or problem under consideration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps change participants' attitudes • Enables participants to see the consequences of their actions • Provides examples of possible reactions or behaviors • Provides a safe environment for exploring problems they may feel uncomfortable discussing in real life • Enables participants to explore alternative approaches to various situations • Explores possible solutions to emotion-laden problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides opportunity for stimulating new ideas while having fun • Engages the group's attention • Simulates the real world • Provides a dramatic way of presenting a problem and stimulating a discussion • Allows participants to assume the personality of another human being (to think and act as another might) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires that participants feel comfortable being in front of a group (some participants may feel self-conscious, shy, or may fear looking "ridiculous") • Requires dyads or triads in which everyone is either acting or observing to address participant reluctance

Facilitator Notes: _____

Assisting Participants in Being Comfortable with the Learning Process

We learn and remember more when we feel comfortable with the learning process. As a facilitator, one of your primary tasks is to create a comfortable place for learning to take place. Learning about cancer can be difficult for many people.

Some Issues that Hinder Learning

- Fear of discovering that one has a high risk of cancer.
- Fear of exposing one's lack of knowledge to others.
- Fear of remembering painful memories of loved ones lost to cancer.

Other issues can include differences in learning styles and cultural beliefs and perspectives. At the beginning of your session, you can reassure participants that these feelings are normal.

Facilitator Notes: _____
