



Clear health communication
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Health Literacy Basics – Teaching to All Adult Learning Styles

Adults do not learn the way children do. Children soak up knowledge from everything they see, hear and do. Adults follow five basic principles in order to learn:

- 1) Adults must self-direct their own learning.
- 2) Adults must have opportunities for critical reflection when learning something new.
- 3) Adults must be able to access their own experiences when learning something new. Additionally, adults will need new experiences in order for learning to “stick.”
- 4) Adults need a purpose for learning. There must be a goal or outcome, as most adults will not learn for the sake of learning.
- 5) **Adults must learn to learn.**

Instead of telling your client what to do to improve her health, ask her to self-select a focus area. Offer choices if she struggles to come up with an idea (example: would you like to start walking more often, or eat more vegetables.) She will have better buy-in if she gets to choose.

Instead of telling your client what is right and wrong with his current health practices (You eat too much salt?), ask questions to promote critical reflection.

- How much salt do you put on your food?
- Do you eat salt at every meal?
- Show me how you would salt your meat.

Don't share your own experiences, but ask about others' experiences to help your client compare his actions to someone else's. (How much salt does your wife add to her food?)

Effective training should cater to the learning needs of the audience. Explain the benefits of the training/education before, during and after the training, with an emphasis on relevant outcomes. Try to connect the benefits to things that motivate or are important to the client.

- Today we are going to talk about how you lower your blood pressure by eating less salt.
- Let's talk about how you can still enjoy tasty meals without adding quite as much salt.

Adults form habits in the way they prefer to take in and process information, and they have different learning styles. Try to include all six adult learning styles in the education and training you offer so that every client has the opportunity to learn in a way that is best suited for him.

- 1) **Visual.** Visual learners need to see simple, easy-to-process diagrams or the written word. Use PowerPoint presentations, pictures, models and underline key phrases in written documents.
- 2) **Aural.** Aural learners need to hear information to learn. They may prefer to read aloud if presented with written material. They enjoy lecture format learning. Remember to still use simple language, three key points, and repeat your points.
- 3) **Print.** Print learners process information by writing it down. They take a lot of notes, notes that they may never look at again.
- 4) **Tactile.** Tactile learners need to do something in order to learn it. They are likely to avoid written instructions and dive right into a hands-on attempt to work it out. They need props they can touch and handle. Let them practice mixing infant formula with you in the room. Let them diaper a baby doll. Let them try to latch a breastfeeding baby, instead of just telling them how to do it.
- 5) **Interactive.** Interactive learners need to discuss learning concepts. Use breakout discussions, small or large-group interaction, and questions and answer sessions for these types of learners.
- 6) **Kinesthetic.** Kinesthetic learners learn through movement. Training exercises and role plays help. Giving people the flexibility to stand and move about the classroom also helps these learners.

It is helpful to know your own preferred learning style, because you will probably find you are most comfortable teaching to your own learning style. You may have to remind yourself to stretch outside your own comfort level and teach to all learning styles.

It's also a good practice, when you can, to ask people how they prefer to learn. Most adults can tell you exactly how they learn best, as well as what learning methods feel deadly dull to them.