

Handout 2: Adult Learning Principles¹

Adult learning occurs best when it:

1. Is self-directed: **Adults must want to learn.** They learn effectively only when they have a strong inner motivation to develop a new skill or acquire a particular type of knowledge. As adults mature, they develop a sense of self autonomy- hence the desire to be self-directed as they see themselves responsible for their own decisions. Their motivation to learn- are both from within and outside (both are important)

Be clear about the personal and professional advantages of learning.

2. Serves to fill an immediate need: **Adults will learn only what they feel they need to learn.** Adults are practical in their approach to learning; they want to know, “How is this going to help me right now?”

Be practical, be direct. Adults need to be able to use these skills immediately so that they see their relevance.

3. Is not passive; participates in the learning as they have experience: **Adults learn by doing.** Children learn by doing, but active participation is more important among adults.

Make sure your training includes many concrete and hands-on examples that appeal to different learning styles.

¹ Adapted from the CEDPA training of trainers manual

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4. Is reflective and addresses their issues-solves problems: **Adult learning focuses on problems and the problems must be realistic.** Children learn skills sequentially. Adults start with a problem and then work to find a solution.

Begin by identifying what the learner can do, what the learner wants to do and then address the gaps and develop practical activities to teach specific skills.

5. Is experiential-learns from doing: **Experience affects adult learning.** Adults have more experience than children. This can be an asset and a liability.

Use the learners' experience (negative or positive) to build a positive future by making sure that negative experiences are not part of their experience in your program.

6. Is in a comfortable environment: **Adults learn best in an informal situation.** Children have to follow a curriculum. Often, adults learn only what they feel they need to know.

Involve adults in the learning process. Let them discuss issues and decide on possible solutions. Make the environment relaxed, informal and inviting.

7. **Adults want guidance.** Adults want information that will help them improve their situation or that of their children. They do not want to be told what to do. They want to choose options based on their individual needs.