

Characteristics of adult learners

Character

Techniques of approach

Motivation – their needs, interests & desire to learn plus they like knowing the reason why.	Clear course of objectives. Also, results of their new learning will be relevant
Practical – learning needs to be useful for self-development and careers. Often frustrated over theory.	Identify learning styles and check that assessment needs are practical where possible.
Self directed – see themselves as independent and having control and responsibility for their own learning	Include them in the planning allowing self assessment/reflection. Make learning participative
Experience – they link new learning and prior learning experiences to test validity of new ideas and how it fits	Check what they already know and discuss linking up new ideas to prior learning
Habits – they can be resistant to change with an attitude that change is not always for the better	Give time to reflect and absorb new information. Explain and link new ideas to prior learning
Learning style – adult learners prefer facilitator style over lecturer style including a peer relationship rather than a hierarchical one	Relate theory to practical and prior knowledge. Include problem based learning and reflection. They value respect and being treated as equals.
Formal learning – often intimidated in formal situations due to past experiences. May lack learning skills	Create a supportive learning environment and utilise strategies that build confidence and self esteem
Responsibilities – adult learners have multiple roles and different priorities	Inform ahead of time and be flexible taking into account trainees other commitments.
Feedback – trainees need to feel a sense of achievement and understand what is working and what isn't.	Frequent feedback on progress in their studies accompanied by encouragement and direction.
Challenge – like to be challenged just above their level of ability BUT not so that it demotivates them	Present material which meets the identified need of the trainee, not what they may already know.

Remember that adult learners differ in age, gender, culture, beliefs, learning styles, backgrounds, education & life.

Be aware and consider these when dealing with your adult trainees.