

The Adult Learner

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A positive learning environment is essential for all students. It is the responsibility of the teacher to provide a space that is physically and emotionally safe. Class members should feel comfortable and be offered opportunities to ask questions and express themselves without judgement. All participants should be respected and valued regardless of their social, economic, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. Students can expect to be challenged and supported throughout their learning. As the teacher gets to know their students, the classroom experience can be adapted and enhanced to fulfill the needs of each student. Classes should be a time for building positive relationships with other students as well as with the instructor. Teachers can capture their audience and encourage engagement with the content by being enthusiastic and planning fun activities.

Adults learn differently than children and teenagers. They may have been away from school for a long time and feel nervous about coming into a space of learning. Adults also come into class with many years of personal experiences and knowledge. They are more selective about what is important to them, they are self-directed, and they are problem-centered. This means they don't need you tell them everything to do. They can work independently and come up with solutions to problems.

For an adult to feel ready to learn they need to feel safe and respected. The environment should be welcoming and the teacher approachable without being fake. Everyone should have opportunities to collaborate on what is being taught and adjustments should be made to meet the needs of those in the class. It is also important that adult students don't feel like they are wasting their time, so activities should be pertinent and practical. These objectives can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Having a welcoming space, snacks, and a get to know you exercise can help everyone feel welcome and safe. I think a survey at the beginning of class to gauge topics of interest, discover learning types, and explore expectations and fears surrounding birth can be a great tool to guide the direction of class. I plan to have several topics prepared and available to teach and discuss leaving the class fluid and adaptable to the needs of the students.

Some effective methods to teach adults include guided discussion, sharing experiences, collaborative problem-solving, narrative storytelling, flexibility of topics, case study scenarios with group discussion on how to deal with the issue brought forward, fun interactive activities, and allowing the students to answer the questions instead of giving them an answer. I love the ideas of using case studies and having the group decide the best course of action. I also plan to do a fun get to know you activity at the beginning of class to break the ice and help everyone connect. I think being willing to switch gears and cover a different topic that is important to the group will be part of my classes. I also plan to share my personal experiences with pregnancy and birth and give class members the opportunity to share their stories if they choose to. I really like the idea of doing some form of artwork to take home from class. And finally, I believe that creating this community of birthing people, learning together can empower the parents of the future to make the best choices for themselves and their babies.

References

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