

## ***Basic Adult Learning Principles to Keep in Mind...For the RN Clinical Instructor***

**Better trained staff will provide better care, will be more confident and happier in their jobs, and often will lead to lower turnover.**

**Adults must see the need to learn.** Therefore, **information should be practical.** If, as instructors, we can constantly relate the content of what we are teaching to staff's jobs and to our residents or clients, it will immediately be more relevant.

**Adult learning is usually seen as a means to an end** rather than as an end in itself. Focus on how staff can use the information; avoid being too theoretical or impractical. *Example:* Learning about ways to avoid difficult behaviors will make tasks easier and less stressful.

**Adults have a variety of learning styles** – visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (motor learning, learning by doing). By a large majority, most adults are primarily visual learners. Thus it is very important to vary how we present material. A single teaching style should be used for about 10 minutes, and no longer than 20 minutes, to keep participants engaged in the learning process.

**Enhancing self-esteem is a strong reinforcer** for learning. Many staff have experienced education as an atmosphere of failure. Focusing on staff strengths and accomplishments will motivate staff to be involved in training.

**Adults are more likely to let mistakes affect their self-esteem** than younger learners. Again, it is imperative to make the training environment a safe place, where staff do not feel they are being set up for failure.

**Adults need to integrate new learning into what they already know.** Whenever possible, build their experiences into the training; this reinforces the importance of their experience and helps them put new ideas in context. We have included discussion questions at some points that build on their experience.

**Information that conflicts with current beliefs or values will be more difficult (or impossible) for staff to learn.** In order to produce behavioral change, learning must impact feelings, beliefs, and values. But this kind of learning takes more time, and requires us to be patient and nonjudgmental. It is imperative that we do not imply that staff values are wrong; rather we must try to help them see other points of view. *Example:* Many staff believe that difficult individuals with dementia are intentionally resistant or combative. Teaching them about the changes in the brain, and the course of Alzheimer's disease may help combat this belief, but it will take time and repeated reinforcement.

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*Example:* We all hold strong values about families and how they “should” behave. Many times what staff see in families of residents conflicts with their values about what families “should” do. Helping them begin to understand their own value systems, and to empathize with families who come from different experiences can help begin to change attitudes. However, it will not be easy!

### **Fast-paced, complex, or unusual learning tasks may interfere with learning.**

Choose activities with which staff will be comfortable, and break complex tasks into simple steps for learning.

**Adults like to know what they will be learning.** Clarifying goals, expectations, and the agenda at the beginning helps most adults feel more comfortable.

**Adult attention spans are often about 15-20 minutes.** It is helpful to plan to change your mode or location about every fifteen minutes.

**It is important to reinforce “minority” opinions** and the fact that there are generally multiple ways of approaching any situation. This can help dispel resistance among staff, teach tolerance, and reinforce a creative, less judgmental approach to problems.

*Example:* Most of the staff believed that Mrs. Jones’ combativeness was due to a long-standing “ornery” personality problem, which her daughter confirmed. Two staff, however, wonder whether she became combative when she was frightened. The instructor reinforced that as another possible factor and led a discussion about what staff could do to help her feel more secure if, indeed, she is frightened.

**Adult learners learn better when they can readily apply the information.** To help them integrate new materials and approaches, it is important to help them identify ways they can apply them. Have them practice skills as quickly as they are demonstrated.

**Adults learn better in a comfortable environment.** We are all influenced to greater and lesser extents by our environments. If training occurs in a dismal, uncomfortable room, staff are sure to be less responsive. Can you do anything to improve the training environment? Can you provide snacks or drinks? Food always helps create a more pleasant atmosphere!

### **Professionalism.**

Because instructors are role models, they should be confident and enthusiastic. A training session is not an opportunity to display your talents or extensive knowledge, but rather a chance to help others develop skills. An instructor should set the example of what a positive leader should be by wearing based on the training session environment.

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### **Effective Communication Skills**

Instructors must foster a learning environment in which learners feel comfortable taking risks without the fear of ridicule. Such an environment depends on the instructor's ability to create open lines of communication. Not only must instructors be able to explain tasks and procedures clearly, they also must know how to listen actively and be sensitive to the importance of body language and nonverbal communication. Good communication skills are an absolute must for effective instructors.

### **Rapport**

Capable instructors demonstrate good interpersonal skills when they interact with participants. Supplemental instructors who are also friendly and congenial exhibit the ability to handle conflict without losing their cool.

### **Organizational Skills**

The ability to balance various responsibilities and manage time is critical to successful training.

### **Experience**

**20:48:04.01:14(2).** The person teaching a training program is a registered nurse who is currently licensed as a registered nurse in South Dakota and has a minimum of two years of clinical nursing experience.

### **Other Characteristics and Skills of Effective Instructors:**

- Patience
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Ability to nurture others
- Creativity
- Commitment to the position
- Ability to be a team player

### **They understand why something is important to know or do**

In Med Aide Training, you will have participants in your course who want to be there as well as the ones who have to be there. As an instructor, part of your responsibility is to help both types of participants understand why and how the course is going to help them. "What's in it for me?" is a common, if usually unexpressed, question among adult learners. In a well-designed and facilitated course, the purpose should become evident through content as well as the stated course objectives or promotional materials. But it might also be important for you to help answer the "what is in it for me?" question by sharing how the course can help them. We know many new employees are reluctant to ask when they hear a term they do not understand or the training does not relate to them, so they begin to tune out. If we teach in

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terms or concepts the participants are familiar with, we can help them get off to a better start. It helps to encourage them to ask questions.

### **Learning is experiential**

Experiential learning can either be by having lived an experience or by practicing an experience. The patrol method, where instructors demonstrate and then learners practice skills, is a major example of experiential learning. Experiential training can include the sharing of relevant experience of the instructor or learners, or can be done via role-playing, skits, discussions, brainstorming, or other methods that requires personal involvement.

### **The time is right for them to learn (problem solving)**

When an adult takes on a new role, is when the time for learning is right. That is when they have the most motivation to learn. If we wait, they may think they already know what to do and we have missed the best opportunity for learning. But this concept also relates to unplanned teaching moments. When a question, challenge, or problem arises, it is a good time for learning to occur because the learner's motivation is high.

### **The process is positive and encouraging**

A course filled with positive reinforcement and fun will enhance learning. An old proverb says, "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand." Participatory, experiential learning has a real impact on how adults learn, what they retain, and then what they apply on the job.

The purpose of any training session should be to engage your audience so they learn, appreciate, and understand the material.

**Introduction** An effective instructor creates, seeks, and finds opportunities for learning. However, not all instructors, and not even all effective instructors, use the same training methods to create learning opportunities. Each of us is particularly adept at one or two training methods. We base the methods we use on our own learning styles and the environment in which we were educated. Information can be presented in any number of ways. To be an effective instructor, one must be familiar with the training methods used most often:

- Lecture
- Informal Talk
- Demonstration
- Case Study
- Role-Play
- Simulation

### **Lecture Method**

Lecture is when one person conveys information to a group by talking to them. It

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has little participant interaction, feedback, or collaboration.

Question: *When might be an appropriate time to use a lecture?*

Answers should include:

- Very large group
- Introductory lesson
- Students have no background or experiences to share
- Audience's primary intention is to listen to an expert

Advantages:

- The same information may be shared in a time-efficient manner with a large number of people.
- The information is not altered or sidetracked by comments from those in attendance.
- Expert information is shared.

Disadvantages:

- To be sure learning occurs, a test or question/answer or discussion periods should be used to follow up.
- Even with visuals, the overall depth of learning and remembering will be low.
- However, lecture is the preferred method of learning for some adults.
- Successful learning is dependent on the instructor's knowledge and skills.

### **Informal Talk Method**

An informal talk is similar to a lecture, except learners are more involved. Some feedback is obtained through questioning, participant answers and feedback, and brief discussions on points. During the informal talk method, the instructor is imparting knowledge but is allowing the learner to help find the answers.

Question: *When might be an appropriate time to use an informal talk?*

Answers should include:

- When the information is less technical or is familiar to the learners
- Material may be relatively new to the participant, but they may have some experience relevant to the topic
- When time is available to allow discuss or questions from the learners
- For most purposes in general training (rather than using lecture)

Again, the instructor may choose to have a recorder (with excellent handwriting) record the participants' answers on a whiteboard or flip chart. This will allow students taking notes to recapture the points that were most important to them.

Advantages:

- An informal talk is generally more comfortable for everyone.
- An informal talk usually involves a smaller amount of material (than a lecture).
- An informal talk allows learners to ask relevant questions and be more involved in the learning process.

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Disadvantages:

- The leader must be well-versed in the subject matter and willing and able to answer questions.
- An informal talk cannot be a canned presentation.
- Learners might interrupt the presentation of material with a question that is not relevant.
- The presenter must know how to deal with interruptions effectively to keep the presentation on track.

### **Demonstration Method**

A demonstration is when the instructor is teaching a skill and the team actually performs a task. The instructor shows and explains how to do “something.” The best follow-up to a demonstration is having the participants do the task themselves. It is best used in a small group when there is plenty of time available, or if the skill to be learned will not take much time for learners to grasp. It provides hands-on experience (hear, see, do), and each learner can go at his own pace to achieve mastery. It also requires plenty of attention from the instructor.

### **Case Study Method**

A case study is a realistic situation or a series of actual events involving a judgment call. It is presented to learners, either orally or by handout, for analysis and resolution. Sometimes the actual participants are available and the instructor can use a panel discussion to evaluate the actions and decisions made. It is good to use to get all learners involved when real-life situations make your point more effectively than other methods, where no clear-cut or easy solution to a problem is evident, or where multiple points of view will help learners understand important concepts. Case studies should be relevant to the lives and/or experiences of the learners to be most effective.

### **Role-Play Method**

During role-play, leaders or learners act out roles presented in an open-ended situation. Role-playing is distinguished from drama because the lines are not predetermined. The participants must supply their own dialog within the context of the roles and situations, and may develop their own ending or outcome to the scenario. Like case study, the role-play method allows participants to examine multiple points of view. Adults enjoy role-playing as much as kids.

Question: *What are the primary ways case studies differ from roleplay?*

Answers should include:

- Role-play is less structured; a case study is intentionally guided/structured
- Case study normally is a re-evaluation of an actual event; role-play typically is fictional
- Both avoid black/white—right/wrong situations in order to encourage discussion, examination, and reflection

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### **Simulation**

A simulation is an excellent training method that has great potential for presenting a complete message to the group, but its use is limited to situations that may not be easy to prepare, and those often do not fit into a daylong training session. Instructors should be aware of the potential value of simulations. A simulation is a more complex form of role-playing and case study. Simulations are used to recreate environments where participants experience potential situations that could happen.

### **Be yourself and relax.**

**Believe in your message.** Live and breathe your message.

**Change your public speaking attitude.** Change fear of speaking to excitement about speaking.

**Re-energize participants with “pattern breaks.”** Change the tone of voice or pattern of speech. Move to a different part of the room. Change the pace.

**Know your presentation tools.** Practice!!

**Have fun!** Don't be afraid to have fun. Create an atmosphere where people are free to laugh.

**Additional Guidelines for RN Clinical Instructors** of Avera Education & Staffing Solutions, Med Aide On-line Training Solutions program.

Any questions or assistance needed on enrollment contact (605) 668-8478. We are happy to help you! Also, if needed, AESS fax number is (605) 668-8483 if you wish to fax the Med Aide Training Documentation form, 1:1 Clinical Checklist, and a copy of the student's HS Diploma or equivalent (GED). Our email address is: [averasolutions@avera.org](mailto:averasolutions@avera.org).

The RN Clinical Instructor, is responsible to complete, sign, and date the Med Aide Training Documentation form and the 1:1 Clinical Checklist, and also obtain the signature and date of the nursing assistant enrolled and trained in the AESS program for both documents. Submit this document as soon as possible. If the student is finished with the on-line modules and on-line lab, and exams, please notify AESS (605) 668-8475 to shut down and discontinue the students on-line access and password. This allows additional passwords to be utilized for other enrolled students.

References: [http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/547417\\_2](http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/547417_2) - retrieved 12/10/13  
<http://www.qotfc.edu.au/resource/?page=65375> – retrieved 10/15/14