

Task 2: Applying Adult Learning to Adoptions

In this task, we'll identify essential factors that influence how adults learn and retain the information they learn. We can then brainstorm how to apply our new knowledge of adult learning to the adoption experience.

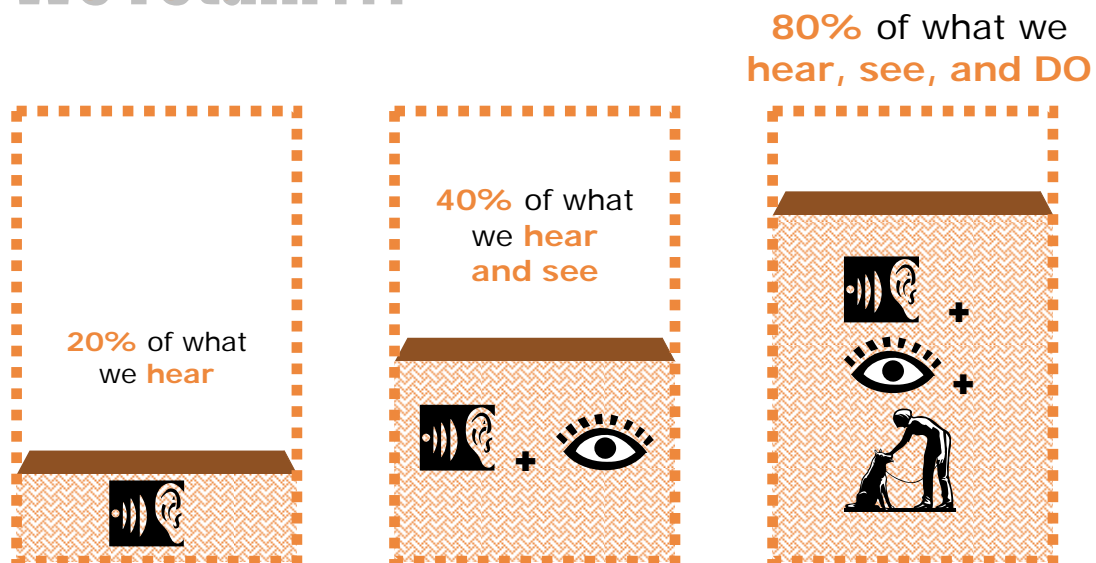
As a warm-up: reflect on a really good learning experience you've had as an adult. Briefly tell one other person about this experience.

So little time and **so much information** often drive our impulse to just tell adopters everything we can. Our motivation – helping adopters succeed – is excellent. Knowing more about how adults learn helps us use the right tools to help adopters understand information, remember it, and put it to use when they need it.

20/40/80 Percent Retention of Information

First, let's consider how much new information we adults can absorb at one time. The following diagram shows how the method by which we receive information affects how well we can hang onto that information.

We retain ...



➤ Think for a few moments about what helps you retain new information or a new skill. For example, how do the following influence whether you can bake a loaf of yeast bread on your own in the future?

- Reading a recipe
- Watching an experienced baker
- Making the bread yourself, with a friendly baker to instruct you and point out what to look for and feel as you prepare the yeast and work with the dough

Five Principles to Enhance Adult Learning

Now let's consider how the adult brain determines what information and skills are worth retaining.

In the 1960's, Malcolm Knowles conducted a series of studies to identify the factors necessary for adults to learn. Additional research has confirmed that - in any situation where they are presented with new information – adults learn best when circumstances meet the following principles:

<p>Respect</p>	<p>Adults are more open to learning new things when they are acknowledged for the wisdom, skills and resources they bring to the new situation. The root word for respect is the same as that for “spectacles.” Respect can be literally translated as “I see you.”</p> <p>To show respect in a learning environment, acknowledge people for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who they are, • What they know and do, and • What they bring to the present situation.
<p>Relevance</p>	<p>When you were in school and a teacher introduced a complex theory or some historical minutia or a difficult algebra equation, do you remember anyone asking, “why do we have to know this?” That question represents the learner’s desire for relevance!</p> <p>It’s the same for adults, except that adults are in charge of their own lives – so if a “teacher” doesn’t make the information relevant to the adult learner, that learner will decide it is unimportant and leave the information behind.</p> <p>To ensure relevance in a learning environment, ask people what they would like to learn and how that information will be useful to them. Then you can work together to find the answers to their questions. Sometimes people don’t know what they don’t know. In such cases, you can help the adult learner to take in new information by explaining how the information will be useful in their lives.</p>

<p>Immediacy</p>	<p>For adults to retain new information, they must be able to see a useful application for the information – right away – in their own lives. Immediacy builds on relevance, giving the adult learner a way to put their new knowledge to work for them.</p> <p>To incorporate immediacy, you will need to know something about your learners so that you can point out how they can put the information you present to use - right away - in their situations. Often, if you have done a good job of demonstrating respect and relevance, the learners will figure out the immediate applications for themselves (these often look like “aha” moments).</p> <p>You can also ask about plans for the near future. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Do you already have a plan for how you’d like your first night with your new puppy to go?” • “What else can I help you with to get your relationship with your new cat off on the right foot?”
<p>Safety</p>	<p>Learning takes a lot of energy and requires focus. People are more capable of learning when it is safe enough to do so. While there are many variations in how people like to learn, generally a safe learning environment is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive, • Free from threat of physical or emotional harm, and • Meets at least some of the learners’ needs for concentration (not too loud or chaotic, etc.) and comfort (not too warm or cold, ample seating, etc.). <p>To practice safety, look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to praise learners for their accomplishments • Ways to correct mistakes that help people retain their dignity <p>Safety doesn’t mean there will be no challenge or no corrections; it means only that there will be no dumb questions.</p>
<p>Engagement</p>	<p>Engagement is closely related to the 20/40/80% retention concept. An old proverb speaks eloquently of engagement: “Tell me...and I will forget. Show me...and I may remember. Involve me...and I will understand.”</p> <p>People learn best when they are actively involved in acquiring the information. Active involvement can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicing a new skill right away • Using new information to solve a problem • Having a meaningful dialogue about the ramifications of the information <p>To reach that 80% of retention – to really engage your learners – look for ways to get your learners to <i>do</i> something (right then and there) with the information you’re providing.</p>

➤ As a group, create one-sentence definitions (in your own words) to explain each of these learning criteria. Write your definitions on flipchart pages.

Adult Learning in the Adoption Experience

Your facilitator will organize you in groups to brainstorm specific ways to apply adult learning criteria to the adoption experience.

➤ Write your suggestions on sticky notes, and post them on the corresponding flipchart page.

Remember that many excellent ways to use the criteria aren't necessarily words that you say or questions that you ask. Think of **anything and everything that can help your adopters learn** what they really need to know:

- Look beyond what you can say to an adopter. Consider nonverbal ways of creating a learning environment:
 - How the adoption space is arranged
 - Things to have on hand
 - Posters, fact sheets or handouts
 - Activities you and the adopter can do together to help the adopter learn
- If your examples begin "Tell them ...," this is a good clue that your approach is to lecture – and you can expect only 20% retention at best.
 - How can you convey the information in a way that actively involves the adopter?

Also, be sure to be very specific:

- **Specific:** "When adopter arrives, come out from the counter to greet them, and introduce yourself."
- **Not specific:** "Greet adopter respectfully."

➤ During the group discussion of the suggestions, you may want to jot down the suggestions you'll want to use right away when you are with an adopter.

Concept	Ways You Can Apply It
20/40/80	For example: Tell the adopter how to use a gentle leader; demonstrate how to put a gentle leader on their new dog; then let them put the gentle leader on while you watch and assist.
Respect	For example: Give the adopter eye contact and your full attention (no multi-tasking).
Relevance	For example: Identify the most commonly asked questions of new dog or cat owners, and post friendly, engaging signs or displays that thoroughly answer these questions.
Immediacy	For example: Answer the adopter's questions (or find someone who can).
Safety	For example: Make everything in your adoption center (including your adoption process) easy to understand with clear, friendly signs in simple, plain language.
Engagement	For example: Invite adopting families to join you and their prospective animal in a "get acquainted" room and encourage their interaction with the animal and their questions for you.



What is one way you've already been applying a learning principle in your adoption counseling (before this workshop)?

What is one new way you will apply an adult learning principle in your counseling after today?