

# When do adults learn best?

Adults learn best when:

they are treated with respect, as selfdirecting persons. If adults perceive that they are being treated as children or without respect (being talked down to or given simplistic explanations, with their questions ridiculed or ignored), they will not participate.

the learning situation is related to their past experiences. Adults have different experiences and the adult educator should relate the content and method of the learning situation to the adult's previous experience and should design activities that assist adults in becoming more aware of their experiences.

they have participated in the planning of the learning activity and set their own goals. Besides consulting at least some of the prospective participants in program planning, adults should be asked early in the program what they hope and expect to get out of the participation

they are physically comfortable and can socialize with those in the learning group. A comfortable setting, breaks, refreshments and opportunities to get to know one another are not just "nice things to do" but are essential elements in adult learning.

there are opportunities for a variety of learning activities. Because adults have had more and varied experiences they differ from each other more than children or adolescents. Not only should there be a variety of topics, but a variety of methods.

they are with their peers, freely learning in groups. Adults need to react to what they are learning with others. Small groups, reporting back to the larger assembly, are the better approach so that even the most timid has a chance to react with a few trusted friends.

in a problem-centered situation, when a question needs resolving or when a task needs doing. It helps to focus the problem through a written response or reflection to which one verbalizes the "what" and "why."

they can see progress, immediate results and some rewards for the time they put into learning. Adults need to see results that will help them personally (grow in their own faith) or functionally (be better parents or deal with a particular problem).

they evaluate themselves. Some kind of reaction or evaluation method should be used at the conclusion of adult programs so that the reactions of the participants can be used in planning followup or future programs.

From: Getting Started in Adult Religious Education by James J. DeBoy, Jr., Paulist Press.