

# How Adults Learn

Adults learn differently from children. They have life experiences to draw upon and don't want to be told what to do. In SNAP-ED, we want to be sure to treat adults as adults and not as children being taught in school.

Adult learners bring unique life experiences to each learning interaction and learn best when information presented is meaningful, engaging and presented in a respectful and safe environment. The acronym **RISE** represents this approach and captures important insights about adult learning theory.

## Respectful

- Adults want to feel important and valued.
- Adults want to feel respected for who they are, where they have been, and what they know how to do.
- Adults want to connect the information currently available with what they have done in the past.
- Adults want to be treated as equals and allowed to voice their opinions freely, within reason, and be active participants in the learning process.
- Adults do not want to be judged or “tested” about having right answers.

## Immediately meaningful

- Adults want to feel what they are learning is helpful in their own lives right now, that it is something they can take back and use right away.
- Adults want to self-discover how the information relates to their life and how it helps them meet their goals now or in the near future.
- Adults are practical and best relate to something that is immediately meaningful.
- Adults value their time and want to be sure that time invested in a group session is time well spent.

## Safe

- Adults need a positive, encouraging environment in order to feel comfortable, confident and willing to jump in.
- Adults need to trust the learning environment, facilitator, group session design, and objectives.

## Engaging

- Adults need to be involved, and participate in their learning in a manner that meets their learning style.
- Adults learn best when they talk to others about their experiences and relate these experiences to the learning process.

### Reflection Activity

Think about how you learn. Which of the **RISE** elements is most meaningful to you? Why?

## Learning Styles

Many factors affect how, when or what a participant learns. A participant's motivation level, the time of day, the age of their child, and the factors of everyday living all influence a learner.

In addition, each of us learns through a combination of learning styles: auditory, visual, kinesthetic or reading. Although most people prefer one of the four styles, if only one learning style is used in a session, many learners will not absorb the information offered. In other words, you can help participants learn by including activities from each learning style in every group.

Using a variety of teaching methods helps everyone retain information better. People more often remember what they learn when they practice or use their learning rather than when they only read or hear information. Interacting with the information, practicing new behaviors, and sharing what you learn with a person in a group are all ways to help us remember and apply what we have learned.

## Auditory

Auditory learners learn best by listening, they “hear” what they learn. They respond to speech such as lecture or audio recordings, music and rhythm, rhymes or word plays. They prefer to discuss ideas and will retain things they say or repeat in a group session.

### **Auditory learners:**

- Learn through hearing
- Like to listen to debates, podcasts, lectures, discussion and verbal instructions
- Enjoy listening to music
- Give verbal directions (go one block and turn left)
- Remember names, recall facts, have big vocabulary
- Reveal emotions through verbal language and change in tone
- Respond better when hearing information rather than reading information
- Relate to phrase “I hear what you mean”

## Visual

Visual learners learn best when they see something or can look at what they are learning. They like to see photos, models, maps, graphs, etc. They want written materials with pictures and handouts. They respond well to film, videos, demonstrations and charts. Vivid descriptions that include color, size and relationships to other objects help them “see” the information in their mind.

### **Visual learners:**

- Learn through seeing
- Like to see pictures or diagrams
- Like watching demonstrations and videos
- Give directions by drawing a map
- Enjoy watching television, going to movies
- Remember people by sight, do not forget faces

- Reveal emotions through facial expressions and good eye contact
- Recalls things they have seen
- Prefer to be shown rather than told
- Relate to phrase “I see what you mean”

## **Kinesthetic**

Kinesthetic learners learn best when they can do something, they want to “touch or feel” what they learn. They do best with “hands on” activities such as participating in a demonstration, writing a response, role playing or putting together a puzzle or a model.

Incorporating a movement such as standing up, changing chairs, raising hands, or holding up cards etc. will encourage learning.

### **Kinesthetic learners:**

- Learn through physical activities and through direct involvement
- Like to be “hands-on”, moving, touching, and experience things first hand
- Give directions by leading the way
- Enjoy active pursuits such as walking, running, hiking, dancing, and biking
- Remember things that happen
- Reveal emotions through body language
- Learn well by touching and exploring objects
- Feel when something is right; rely on gut feeling

## Reading

These learners learn best by reading. They prefer that information be written down. Offering handouts, outlines, written instructions or materials to take notes on will enhance their learning experience. Documenting highlights of group discussions on flip charts or dry erase boards will encourage learning for readers.

### Readers:

- Like to have clear, written information and instructions
- Like to read books and magazines
- Give directions by writing out instructions
- Remember things they have read
- Prefer reading independently rather than being read to
- Read instructions before beginning a project ; follow recipes closely
- Trust information that is written more than what is heard
- Often seek out additional information on the internet or from some other written source

## Putting it all Together

The following example highlights how an activity could combine the various learning styles. This would be appropriate for a lesson on healthy snacks in which each participant was provided a box of raisins.

*I'd like to talk with you about raisins (**Auditory**).*

*They are a nutritious snack. You can see that these are dark raisins that are packaged in a convenient box (**Visual**). Take a taste (**Kinesthetic**). How would you describe the flavor and texture? They taste good, sweet and chewy. When you look at the label, you see that they are a good source of fiber, are low sodium, fat free, and a good source of quick energy (**Read**). All of these elements make raisins a good choice for snack time.*