

ORIENTATION

Module 3

Goals of Orientation:

You should offer the student so much information that when you are done with orientation, the student should be able to answer the questions...Should I be here? Is this the right time?

- ❖ **Introduce ABE Program and the Requirements**
- ❖ **Find out why the student is enrolling**
- ❖ **Defuse myths and fears**
- ❖ **Establish rapport**
- ❖ **Determine it is a good time to start**
- ❖ **Give either a student handbook or give a program description and schedule. Go through their schedule and the programs to see where it fits.**

Things to keep in mind:

1. Don't have preconceived ideas about who the adults are that walk through your door. The last grade the student attended in school is not the grade level they may be functioning at right now. Go slowly and establish a foundation of success that the student can build on. Few things are as scary as stepping through the door to your future.
2. Retention is a concern of many programs. While the overall quality of programs influence attendance and retention rates, the orientation process is a key component in creating a positive learning environment, establishing clear expectations, and planning effective instruction. This is where they buy into what you have to offer.
3. The initial meeting and first few sessions in an adult program set the stage for success of adult learners and persistence in achieving their goals. Like any new experience, entering an adult education program is a change for the person. Each student will have varied emotions, questions, and concerns. Some have not had positive experiences in educational settings and are apprehensive they may fail again. For others, it has been a long time since they have had educational experiences, and they are concerned they will not be able to fit in or be able to complete the work. It takes a great deal of courage to walk through the door.
4. When students come through your door, it is critical to make them feel welcome and have the sense of safety and security in a learning environment. You are the first point of contact. Remember that many learners (up to 50%) who leave make the decision to do so after the first few meetings (Less than 12 hours). Making the first experience welcoming and positive can increase student comfort levels, reduce anxiety, and reinforce their decision to continue their education.

Five Basic Principles of the Adult Learner

1. Adults see themselves as self-sufficient and responsible for their own learning.
2. Adults may have relevant life experiences that they can bring to class.
3. Adults know what they want from the class.
4. Adults want to know “why.”
5. Adult motivation comes from internal rather than external factors.

Concerns and beliefs of the Adult Learner

- Uncertain about their ability to succeed
- Fearful that they are unable to learn
- Haven't studied in years; out of practice
- Uncertain whether they can read, write, or do math well enough to come to class
- Anxious about taking tests; were always nervous taking tests
- Past history in school is not good; won't be able to compete; only a few smart students receive high grades
- Unsure about using computers – don't know enough about them
- Internet talk is confusing and over their heads
- Won't fit in – will be an outsider in a world much different from their own
- Don't know anyone there
- Instructors won't like having older students in their classes
- Will take too long to get a _____ (college degree, certificate, etc.) if they are only part-time.
- Friendships and family relationships will suffer; will have to spend so much time doing schoolwork that family and friends will feel rejected
- Fear never having enough time for outside interests
- No employment/money issues
- Childcare/transportation
- Too tired to come to class because of work
- May be stressed about being required to attend class by court or a social services agency
- May have negative people in their lives
- Not proficient in English
- Lack self-esteem and may be looking for a sense of accomplishment

What is included in an orientation?

1. Orientation should include a review of information about physical location, rules and procedures, schedules, and answers to common questions. Discuss the general policies and expectations of the program and the consequences of noncompliance. Be consistent in seeing that expectations are met. Include such things as the following:

- Policies on smoking, drugs, and drinking
 - Regulations specific to the site (parking, use of the computer lab, etc.)
 - Behavior regarding attendance, children in the classroom, dress codes, food and drink in the classroom and/or the computer lab
 - Issues with cell phones, Ipods, etc.
2. It is also important to make students aware of support services available through the program, community, or local human services agencies (e.g., child care, transportation, health care, employment) that may assist them in overcoming barriers to learning.
 3. Include information about specific learning support services offered by the program (e.g., different types of classes, computer training, writing or math clinics, support groups, student leadership teams, tutors, web sites or discussions lists, etc.).
 4. Because attaining GED credentials is a common goal, include information on the different subject tests, the length of the tests, location of testing centers, the cost of the test, requirements for test registration, and estimated length of time to get test results. Be sure to inform them testing accommodations are available for those who qualify.
 5. Review of information should be accomplished in a non-threatening, friendly manner. Orientation should be designed to make students feel more comfortable in their surroundings.
 6. Orientation is the time for instructors to learn more about how students learn and to help them discover more about themselves as learners. All learners learn differently, have different interests and strengths, and have their own learning preferences. Instruction will be more effective when designed with these strengths, interests, and preferences in mind.
 7. Before administering a survey or inventory, explain that the purpose of the tool is to help the students know how they learn best. There are no right or wrong answers. They may have several strengths, strong interests, or learning styles. That is normal. Let them know that instructors try to use different modes of teaching to suit student preferences. If they learn best in hands-on activities or in group discussions and those activities are not happening in their class, they have the right and responsibility to ask the instructor to include these activities.
 8. Once a student identifies his/her strengths and weaknesses as a learner, the instructor and the learner can work together to identify specific strategies to increase student learning. Instructors should discuss how the information about strengths and styles of learning can be applied, not just in the classroom, but in all areas of their lives.
 9. Adult learners may need a refresher on the basic skills useful for learning. Organization and memory skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and listening and communication skills

are often addressed in orientation. These activities can re-orient students to educational processes and assist them in acquiring skills that will be helpful in their studies.

10. Other useful activities for beginning adult learners include a general orientation that covers how adults learn, note-taking skills, stress management techniques, and team building. You may also need to take some time to discuss the student's reasons for acquiring the knowledge and skills they may see as academic and with no immediate relevance to their own lives.

<http://www.c-pal.net/course> Basics of Adult Literacy Education: An online course for Adult Literacy Instructors, funded by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), United States Department of Education

Check with your local program director for orientation materials!