

Age-Specific Learning Characteristics

Adapted from *Nurse as Educator*, by Susan B. Bastable, Jones and Bartlett Publisher, 1997, pp. 94-98

Learner Characteristics	Teaching Strategies
<p><i>Infancy-Toddlerhood</i> (Birth to Three Years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on environment • Needs security • Explores self and environment • Natural curiosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Orient teaching to caregiver ✓ Provide physical safety and emotional security ✓ Allow play and manipulation of objects
<p><i>Preschooler</i> (3-6 Years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egocentric • Animistic thinking (objects possess life or human characteristics) • Separation anxiety • Motivated by curiosity • Active imagination, prone to fears 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use warm, calm approach ✓ Build trust ✓ Allow manipulation of objects ✓ Provide safe, secure environment ✓ Use simple drawings and stories ✓ Use play therapy, with dolls and puppets ✓ Stimulate senses: visual, auditory, tactile, motor
<p><i>School-Aged Childhood</i> (7-11 Years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More realistic and objective • Understands cause and effect • Deductive/inductive reasoning • Wants concrete information • Variable rates of physical growth • Immediate orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage independence and active participation ✓ Be honest ✓ Use logical explanation ✓ Allow time to ask questions ✓ Use analogies to make invisible processes real ✓ Establish role models ✓ Use play therapy ✓ Provide group activities ✓ Use drawings, models, dolls, painting, audio-and video-tapes
<p><i>Adolescence</i> (12-18 Years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract, hypothetical thinking • Can build on past learning • Reasons by logic and understands scientific principles • Future orientation • Motivated by desire for social acceptance • Peer group important • Intense personal preoccupation • Feels invulnerable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Establish trust, authenticity ✓ Know their agenda ✓ Address fears/concerns about outcomes of illness ✓ Identify control focus ✓ Include in plan of care ✓ Use peers for support and influence ✓ Negotiate changes ✓ Focus on details ✓ Make information meaningful to life ✓ Use audiovisuals, role play, contracts, reading materials
<p><i>Young Adulthood</i> (18-40 Years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous • Self-directed • Uses personal experiences to enhance learning • Intrinsic motivation • Able to analyze critically • Makes decisions about personal, occupational, and social roles • Competency-based learner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use problem-centered focus ✓ Draw on meaningful experiences ✓ Focus on immediacy of application ✓ Encourage active participation ✓ Allow to set own pace, be self-directed ✓ Organize material ✓ Apply new knowledge through role play and hands-on practice



Learner Characteristics	Teaching Strategies
<p><i>Middle-Aged Adulthood</i> (40-65 Years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of self well-developed • Concerned with physical changes • At peak in career • Reflects on contributions to family and society • Reexamines goals and values • Has confidence in abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Focus on maintaining independence and reestablishing normal life patterns ✓ Assess positive and negative past experiences with learning ✓ Provide information to coincide with life concerns and problems
<p><i>Older Adulthood</i> (65 Years and older)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreased ability to think abstractly, process information Decreased short-term memory Increased reaction time Increased test anxiety Stimulus persistence (afterimage) Focuses on past life experiences • Sensory/motor deficits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Auditory changes Visual changes Fatigue/decreased energy levels Chronic illness • Psychosocial changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreased risk taking Selective learning Intimidated by formal learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use concrete examples ✓ Build on past life experiences ✓ Make information relevant and meaningful ✓ Present one concept at a time ✓ Allow time for processing/response (slow pace) ✓ Use repetition and reinforcement of information ✓ Avoid written exams ✓ Use verbal exchange and coaching ✓ Encourage active involvement ✓ Keep explanations brief ✓ Use analogies to illustrate abstract information ✓ Speak slowly ✓ Face client when speaking ✓ Minimize distractions ✓ Avoid shouting ✓ Use visual aids to supplement ✓ Use white backgrounds and black print ✓ Use large letters and well-spaced print ✓ Avoid color coding with blues, greens, purples, and yellows ✓ Increase safety precautions/provide safe environment ✓ Ensure accessibility to prostheses (glasses) ✓ Keep session short ✓ Provide frequent rest periods ✓ Establish realistic short-term goals ✓ Identify and present pertinent material ✓ Use informal teaching sessions ✓ Demonstrate relevance of information to daily life ✓ Assess resources ✓ Make learning positive ✓ Identify past experiences ✓ Integrate new behaviors with formally established ones