

A Note about Adult Learners

As a facilitator, you will be working with adults who are learning how to mentor effectively. Keep in mind the following guidelines as you work with these adult learners.

Create Mutual Respect.

Like a box of chocolates, a class of adult learners comes with all different types. Getting to know your participants—and helping them to know you—is essential because it provides the opportunity for developing mutual respect. To achieve this, greet participants as they begin. Introduce yourself and ask them to do the same, giving their names and sharing past experiences with mentoring relationships (as mentors or as mentees). Remember, you are a part of the learning community too, so share your own experience(s) of serving as a mentor and/or having a mentor. This is also a good time to include an ice---breaker that makes participants feel more comfortable sharing.

Establish Group Norms.

Once everyone has had a chance to get to know each other, it is a good idea to create “norms” for your new learning community. Norms are agreements that are offered by members of the group that say, “This is how we will conduct ourselves during our time together.” Some examples of norms may be “We will honor our time together by starting and finishing on time” or “We will try to see value in differing thoughts and others’ ideas.” Establishing group norms at the beginning will make collaboration much more effective. Norms also allow for participants to have a say in what they will and will not tolerate within this learning community. The facilitator has a responsibility to uphold those norms within the group. One helpful way to do this is by periodically revisiting the norms and asking participants to self---evaluate whether and how they are working to uphold their group norms.

Build Concepts.

Most adults who use these modules have a lot of experience with teaching, and those experiences need to be valued and built upon. For adults to integrate new ideas, they need to consider what they already know. There are multiple prompts in the lessons that elicit participants’ existing knowledge about each topic. Facilitators have a responsibility to listen to participants’ knowledge statements *without judgment* and to scaffold that knowledge in order to reach each lesson’s objectives. As part of this scaffolding process, adult learners benefit from opportunities to critically reflect on their prior knowledge as they consider new knowledge. These modules offer opportunities for participants to critically reflect on the “real world cases” and apply those cases to their own contexts. Then, the module lessons offer new knowledge through the “building knowledge” resources, expert interviews, demos, and activities. Be sure to offer multiple opportunities for adult participants to consider each element of the lessons and to ponder the critical reflection prompts that are offered on the site. In this way, adult learners will determine how they are going to keep—and use—the new information.

Connect and Apply.

Adult learners want to apply what they have learned—they yearn for a real-world connection. As the group engages in each lesson, be sure to state the learning objectives and discuss how these connect with the work that the participants will be doing with beginning teachers. Prompt participants to make the connections verbally or in writing by asking questions like, “How will this change your practice?” or “What are you going to do with this knowledge when you go back to your mentee?” Many of the lessons offer specific activities to help make the connections tangible for participants. Be sure to take the time to do these activities and discuss them.

Don't Forget the Basics!

Prior to beginning the modules, post and review your agenda. Review a few housekeeping items, including revisiting the group norms periodically throughout the course. Make participants aware of where the restrooms are located, when the scheduled breaks are, that people are responsible for themselves and should take a restroom breaks as needed. No need to ask permission!
Consider whether participants need food or drinks and help the group determine a fair way to handle those kinds of needs.