

Adult Learning Transcript

Hello and welcome to the Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs website. We're delighted that you have joined us. My name is Robin. Today's training video is directed to Early Intervention Service Providers and will give guidelines for working with caregivers. If you need a printed copy of these tips, you can download them from this website. As an Early Intervention Service Provider your work will focus on building the confidence and competence of caregivers. Ultimately, children with special needs will benefit as their caregivers become more knowledgeable, capable, involved and resourceful. Because you will be working with adults, it is important to have a basic understanding of how adults learn.

Adults are independent and self-directed. Actively involve adults in the learning process and serve as facilitators for their learning. Find out about their ideas about what areas to cover. During your visits focus on the functional goals generated by the family and early intervention team. For example, you could say, "From looking at the IFSP goals, I understand that it is very important to you that your child learns to communicate. During our visits we'll look at the ways that Johnny is already communicating and how we can further develop these skills."

Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to your partnership. They have a wealth of knowledge about their child. Early interventionists need to connect learning to this knowledge and experience and use the families' information about their child throughout the home visit. For example, ask the mother what motivates her child whether it be stickers or dinosaurs or hugs.

Adults are goal-oriented. They appreciate an educational program that is organized and clearly defined. From the beginning, Early Interventionists should focus on IFSP goals and ways that they will be addressed. For example, you could say, "Looking back at your IFSP goals you mentioned that you would like to meet other families who have children with Down Syndrome. Would you like to talk about ways we can make that happen?"

Adults are relevancy-oriented and practical. They must see a reason for learning something. Explaining ways that the information will help families facilitate their child's development will be highly motivating. You could say something like, "I know you are really wanting Tommy to walk. Children need to learn several different skills to get ready to walk. I'd like to tell you about some of those so that we can help him reach this goal."

Adults learn best in a comfortable, non threatening environment. Having conversations early in your partnership about where to meet, and the best time of the day can get you off to a great start.

Adults act on the information and knowledge that they gain. Encourage families to try new activities during the week built around the regular routine. Dr. Robin McWilliam says, “All intervention for a child occurs between visits. The home visits should be where the family gets information and encouragement so that they can make the most of learning opportunities that happen during normal family life.”

Adults learn best when they are given feedback about progress. By coaching the family you can provide reflection and feedback. **Reflection** follows an observation or action and gives the parent a chance to look at what they are currently doing and make changes as needed. During reflection, you might ask the parent to describe what worked and what didn't work. Then together you can think of alternatives and actions to help improve the parent's knowledge and skills.

Dr. McWilliam explains that **Feedback** happens after the parent has had the opportunity to reflect on his or her observations, actions, or opportunity to practice new skills. Feedback includes affirming statements and adds information to deepen the parent's understanding of the topic. It also includes jointly developing new ideas and actions. You could say, “Your idea to use the dinosaur toy to get Tommy to crawl really made a difference. What do you think would happen if we move the toy a little further away and make a growling sound?”

The adult learner must **retain** information from the home visits to benefit from learning. There are very specific things that you can do to help families retain information. Help families see the meaning or the purpose for that information, understand and be able to interpret and apply the information. If the participants did not learn the material well to begin with, they won't retain it well either. Retention by the learner is directly affected by their amount of practice during the learning, so make sure to give families lots of opportunities to practice during the visit.

I hope that you find these strategies that we discussed today useful during your home visits. Thank you for joining us and being such an important part of early intervention. And thank you for playing such an important role in the lives of our babies. Because remember, babies can't wait.