

Section 3: Integrating mental health education into adult learning

Why integrate mental health education?

Integrating mental health into adult education makes learning safer, more inclusive and more effective.

Mental health influences concentration, participation and confidence, and so through addressing mental health and well-being directly through their teaching practice, educators can help to create enabling environments, where adults can feel comfortable sharing their concerns and seeking help and support when needed.

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Mental health-sensitive curriculum design (1)

Mental health-sensitive design involves embedding emotional well-being across subjects, using inclusive examples and adapting to learner needs.

For example, using group discussion to explore resilience and mental health awareness in different cultural groups.

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Mental health-sensitive curriculum design (2)

Rather than treating mental health as a separate topic, embed emotional and social learning outcomes across subject areas.

For example, a digital skills lesson can include confidence-building, or a language class can include self-expression activities.

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Mental health-sensitive curriculum design (3)

Try to create a curriculum that stretches learners while offering consistent emotional support.

For example: introduce reflective pauses, short mindfulness breaks and group debriefs after challenging content to help learners process and stay engaged.

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Mental health-sensitive curriculum design (4)

Consider involving learners in shaping parts of the curriculum.

Ask what helps them feel safe and engaged.

Co-creating ground rules, choosing topics for discussion or agreeing on learning goals increases ownership and reduces anxiety for learner's who may be struggling with anxiety just be being back in a classroom after some time away from education and training.

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Trauma-informed teaching methods (1)

Trauma-informed approaches acknowledge that learners may carry invisible burdens.

These methods prioritise safety, trust, empowerment, choice and collaboration.

Educators should avoid triggering content and be flexible with deadlines where possible.

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Trauma-informed teaching methods (2)

Trauma-informed teaching is built on five core principles:

- Safety.
- Trustworthiness.
- Choice.
- Collaboration.
- Empowerment.

Educators can apply these principles by creating consistent routines, offering clear expectations and involving learners in decision-making about how they learn.

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Trauma-informed teaching methods (3)

If you suspect that a learner in your group may be suffering from trauma, look out for the following signs:

- Withdrawal.
- Sudden anger or fear.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Avoiding participation.

Rather than interpreting this as disinterest, a trauma-informed approach encourages curiosity and compassion by asking the learner: 'What are you going through?' instead of 'What's wrong with you?'

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Trauma-informed teaching methods (4)

When adopting a trauma-informed approach, try to minimise unpredictability by explaining what to expect from each class.

Also, remember to provide opt-outs for emotionally intense discussions and be flexible with participation.

And always affirm that learners can always choose how and when to engage.

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Trauma-informed teaching methods (5)

Supporting learners who've experienced trauma can be emotionally demanding.

If you are practicing trauma-informed teaching, then you also need to practice self-care.

Educators should build in reflection time, seek supervision or peer support when needed and develop their own strategies for emotional regulation and resilience.

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Inclusive language and delivery

When addressing mental health topics in your teaching, it is important to use accessible, non-stigmatising language.

Be mindful of tone and content.

For example, say 'mental health condition' instead of 'mental illness'; and avoid labels such as 'crazy' or 'unstable'.

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Digital tools for mental health education

Free tools such as the WHO Mental Health Atlas, Headspace, Mindfulness apps and online journaling platforms can support mental well-being.

Educators should evaluate the accessibility and privacy of these tools before recommending them to learners.

There are also some excellent resources in the [Lay Mental Health Advisor Curriculum for Migrant Learners](#), which you can embed directly into your teaching plans.