

Learning Styles in Childbirth Education Classes

There are many different theories about learning styles. I will note a couple of the categories below, and include some thoughts on what elements are essential in childbirth education classes for each of these learners.

Visual – Auditory – Kinesthetic.

- Visual Learners need to see information to retain it: anatomy illustrations, posters illustrating effacement and dilation, doll and pelvis demonstrations, a drawing of the labor curve on the board, a flip chart with the key elements of the lecture written down, demonstrations of comfort techniques, videos, medical equipment such as amni-hooks, epidural needles, oxygen masks, and so on. Avoid: distracting clutter and disturbing images.
- Auditory Learners learn by listening: they do well with lectures, videos, question and answer sessions, small group discussions, and music during relaxation exercises. Avoid: distracting sounds. Use sarcasm cautiously, as some auditory learners will remember the words that you said, but won't remember the underlying sarcasm which makes those words *mean* something else entirely.
- Kinesthetic Learners need to move, and need to hold things in their hands: pass around the doll and the pelvis for them to explore how the baby moves through the birth canal, pass around cervical dilation chart, amnihooks, epidural needles, nursing bras, whatever else you can come up with. Hands-on demonstrations and position practice are essential. Avoid: making them sit still the whole class. Even give permission that "if you feel the need to stand up and move around, feel free to stand in the back of the classroom."

Global versus Analytic

- Some people learn best with the big picture, some want all the little details and want them all broken out into a logical sequence of steps. It's important to offer both within your classes.
- Always have an outline where students can see it, so they have a sense of where you've been, and where you're going. Also, verbally review this within segments of the class: "First, I'm going to tell you the basic big picture about epidurals: what they are and how they work, then we'll go back and walk through the whole process step-by-step so you can see the details."
- I will also cite data often, saying "I know there are those of you like me who want to know numbers and statistical odds, so I'll give you some of that data. If you're someone whose eyes start to glaze over when you hear all that, feel free to just gloss over it..."

Gardner's Learning Styles

- Bodily-Kinesthetic learners use all or part of their body to solve problems. Activities: Practice positions, practice massage, etc. For example, show them several different options for supported squats and encourage them to work with their partners, experimenting to find the best one for them as a pair. Also, when you actively write on the board during class, kinesthetic learners absorb the information better (because they follow the motion of your hand) than they do if information is already written.
- Musical learners create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound. Activities: Use music in classes. Emphasize rhythms of the breathing, and discuss vocalization during labor. Teach mnemonics: like Rhythm, Ritual, and Relaxation for coping with active labor.
- Interpersonal learners recognize and make distinctions about others' feelings and intentions. Activities: Small group discussions, questions and answers, continuum exercises where everyone places themselves in a line based on, for example, their place on the pain medication preference scale.
- Intrapersonal learn by examining their own feelings, and drawing on their own mental models to make decisions about their lives. Activities: Give time for self-reflection; do reflective writing: ask a question and have everyone write down their thoughts about the answer, encourage them to journal in between classes.
- Linguistic learners make sense of the world through using language. Lectures, writing exercises, mnemonics, suggest the coping technique of having someone read to them in labor.
- Logical-Mathematical learners use and appreciate abstract relations. Activities: the Stages of Labor breakdown, and information about how long labor will last, and statistics about relative risks of interventions.
- Spatial learners perceive spatial information, and recreate visual images from memory. Activities: Draw the labor curve on the board, draw a diagram of fear-tension-pain triangle, draw contraction patterns and breathing patterns.
- Naturalistic learners distinguish among, classify, and use features of the environment. Activities: lists of options, outlines, discussion of categories of comfort techniques. For example, list categories first (massage, water, activity) then fill in ideas for each category (effleurage, counterpressure, hip squeeze).