

Education

The Basics: Education

Introduction for the Trainer

Key Content

During this session, participants will learn about public education in the United States, the value of education versus work, and educational options for adults.

Main Messages

In the United States, education is available to all children, regardless of ability, sex, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or social class. Public school is free, and children 7 to 16 must go to school. Schools expect children to behave in certain ways; some of these behaviors may be very different from how schoolchildren are expected to behave in other countries. In the United States, adults, as well as children, often go to school. The trainers should remind participants that self sufficiency should be the primary goal of all adult refugees. Participants will need to weigh the future benefits of school against the immediate need to work and earn an income.



15 minutes

Objectives

Participants will be able to do the following:

- ▶ Define schools' expectations for K-12 students in the United States
- ▶ Discuss the value of education versus work for adults and teenagers
- ▶ Describe some educational options for adults in the United States

Materials

- Basics of Education Statements and Answer Key (included)
- Optional: Basic Information About the U.S. Education System (included)
- Optional: Basics of Education Statements (included)

Key English Vocabulary

- ▶ *certificate*
- ▶ *diploma*
- ▶ *education*
- ▶ *I want to enroll _____ [my child/child's name] in school.*

Note to Trainer

This activity is best done in a space without any furniture, or with furniture pushed to the sides of the room.

Session Preparation

Find out age requirements for attending school in your area. Add this information in the space provided in the second statement of the Basics of Education Statements and Answer Key. Be sure that the statements apply to your area. Make any necessary changes.

Trainers who are not familiar with the U.S. educational system should read Basic Information About the U.S. Education System.

Trainer's Introduction of Session to Participants

During today's session, you will learn some basic information about education in the United States.

Introductory Exercise

Briefly review the key English vocabulary for this plan by saying the first word aloud in English. Participants say the word to a partner, and then all together as a group. Continue in the same way with the rest of the words and the sentence. Throughout the session, emphasize the words as they come up and use the sentence whenever there is an opportunity. If there is time (8 to 10 minutes), use the unit vocabulary found at the end of this unit to help participants better understand key English vocabulary words.

Activity

Ask participants to stand on one side of the room. Walk down the middle of the room with all participants standing to one side of you and explain that you are drawing an imaginary line.

Tell participants that you will read a statement. If they agree with the statement, participants should cross the imaginary line to the other side of the room. If participants do not agree with the statement, they should remain standing where they are.

Read the practice statement from the Basics of Education Statements and Answer Key. Give participants a moment to decide where they will stand. *[Be sure participants understand the activity].* Ask participants why they agree or disagree. Provide participants with the correct answer if needed. Then ask all participants to go back and stand on one side of the line.

Read the second statement from the Basics of Education Statements and Answer Key. Give participants a moment to decide where they will stand. Ask participants why they agree or disagree with the statement, after making sure that participants understand it. Use the suggested answer listed after the statements if needed. Then ask all participants to stand on one side of the line before reading the next statement. Change the side that participants start on frequently so that some participants are not just standing in one place all the time.

Continue this way until all of the statements have been read. Debrief the activity as a full group using the questions below.

Debriefing Questions

- ▶ What are some facts about public education in the United States that you heard about during this session?
- ▶ What is the value of working versus going to school for teenagers and adults?
- ▶ What are some educational options for adults in the United States?

Working With Individuals or Very Small Groups

This session can be conducted with an individual or very small groups, as well as larger groups.

Variations and Considerations

If needed, use translated versions of the Basics of Education Statements and Answer Key.

When working with a literate group, consider giving each participant, or each small group of participants, a copy of the Basics of Education Statements to read. Participants can decide how they would respond to the statements before discussing as a full group.

Basics of Education Statements and Answer Key

1. In the United States, girls are not expected to attend school after the age of 12.
(Practice statement)
Answer: False
2. School is required for students until they are at least ___ years old.
Answer: True
3. Schools have special services, such as counselors and low-cost lunches, for students who need them.
Answer: True
4. Schools expect parents to be involved in their children's education.
Answer: True
5. Public school is free, but there may be some costs related to your child's K-12 education.
Answer: True
6. Most children do not have homework.
Answer: False
7. After-school activities, such as student government or a sports team, teach children how to get along with people and other life skills.
Answer: True
8. When family income is low, working is more important than school for young adults as well as adults.
Answer: True
9. Most people in the United States consider education to be a lifelong experience.
Answer: True
10. If you are working, you cannot go to school or a training program.
Answer: False
11. If an adult does not have a high school diploma, s/he can get a special high school diploma, called a *GED*.
Answer: True
12. Education after high school is free for everyone.
Answer: False
13. Adults who want to continue their education may be eligible for financial aid.
Answer: True

Basic Information About the U.S. Education System

[This information is for trainers who need to become more familiar with the U.S. education system.]

Children and Youth

Elementary and secondary school education is available to everyone in the United States, regardless of ability, sex, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or social class. Most Americans view education as a way to get better jobs and improve their standard of living.

Public education is free and mandatory for all children between 7 and 16 years of age. In some states, children under 7 and over 16 must also attend school. Throughout the United States, school is available to students 18 and younger, and in some states, students up to 21 years of age can attend public schools.

The United States does not have a national system of education controlled by the central government. There are no national education requirements or courses of study. States and local school districts decide what students will study, what books they will use, and what they have to do to pass from one grade to another.

Public schools are available throughout the country free of charge. By law, public schools cannot have any religious affiliation. Private schools are also available in most areas, and some have religious affiliations. Private schools charge tuition, which can be very expensive.

It is important that children are enrolled in school as soon as possible after they arrive in their new communities. Case workers/managers help with this process. Most schools require that parents give them a copy of their child's immunization records.

There are four levels of education for children in the United States. Children in the same grade may be different ages, although most children are usually within 1 to 2 years of each other in age.

- ▶ *Preschool.* This level is for children 3 to 5 years of age. It is not required by law, and it is usually not free.
- ▶ *Elementary school.* This level begins with kindergarten (age 5) and continues through fifth or sixth grade (age 12).
- ▶ *Middle or junior high school.* This level usually includes sixth or seventh through eighth or ninth grade, for children ages 12 to 14.
- ▶ *High school.* This level usually includes ninth or tenth grade through twelfth grade, for children ages 14 to 18. Students who complete school requirements at this level receive a high school diploma.

Many schools have special English language classes for children whose first language is not English. Other schools offer extra help to children who need it through a special teacher or a tutor.

There are schools or special classes for children with special needs, such as those with emotional or behavioral issues, learning disabilities, and other physical or mental disabilities. In some communities,

there are also special schools or classes for children with high academic ability in general or with talent in a certain subject area, such as math, sciences, or the arts.

The school year begins in August or September and ends in May or June. Most children attend classes about 6 hours a day, Monday through Friday. Students who need additional time to complete work for their classes may attend summer school in June and July.

Attending school is very important. When students miss school, parents must write a note that explains why the student was absent, and students have to make up the school work they missed.

Although public school is free, parents pay some expenses, such as the cost of school supplies and fees for special activities. Children can take lunch to school or buy low-cost, nutritious lunches in the school cafeteria. Many schools also offer breakfast. Schools may also offer breakfast and lunch for free or at a low cost for children from low-income families.

Some children live close enough to the school to walk there. If the school is too far from home for a child to walk, school buses may provide free transportation to school. The school system will decide the distance from school for free transportation.

The style of teaching and learning in U.S. schools may be different from the style in other countries. In the United States, teachers encourage children to learn by thinking and analyzing, asking questions, and joining in discussions and activities. Students may even disagree with their teachers, if they do so in a respectful way.

Common subjects include English, science, social studies (which often includes history and geography), mathematics, and foreign languages. Many schools also offer special subjects, such as physical education, art, or music. At the high school level (and in some cases at the middle school level), students can usually choose some of their courses.

School, state, and national testing is common and often mandatory for all students.

Most public schools do not have uniforms, but most do have dress codes that students must obey.

Behavior in U.S. schools is informal, compared to schools in other countries. However, students are expected to learn and obey the rules. Students who break the rules are punished in different ways, depending on the school. They may have to talk to the principal, do extra school work, or stay after school. If they do something really serious, they might have to leave the school. Physical punishment is illegal in U.S. schools.

Adults

For adults, most communities offer many different kinds of educational opportunities. Here are some that you may find in your community:

- ▶ English language and literacy classes
- ▶ Training courses in areas such as computer technology, foreign languages, and secretarial skills

- ▶ General Education Development (GED) diploma classes for adults who do not have a high school diploma
- ▶ Vocational and technical schools
- ▶ Community colleges
- ▶ Colleges or universities (usually 4-year programs), offering a Bachelor of Arts degree
- ▶ Graduate schools offering advanced degrees in many fields.

The cost of these classes, schools, and colleges varies a great deal. For example, a 4-year college can be very expensive. Vocational and technical schools can also be expensive. In general, community college classes are less expensive than 4-year colleges. Most schools and colleges offer some financial aid to students who need it.

Continuing education for adults is very common in the United States, and Americans of all ages, including older adults, take courses that interest them or will help them in some way. "You are never too old to learn" is a popular American saying.

Basics of Education Statements

Directions: Read the statement. Decide if it is true or false, and circle your answer. The first one is done for you.

1. In the United States, girls are not expected to attend school after the age of 12.	True	False
2. School is required for students until they are at least __ years old.	True	False
3. Schools have special services, such as counselors and low-cost lunches, for students who need them.	True	False
4. Schools expect parents to be involved in their children's education.	True	False
5. Public school education is free, but there may be some costs related to your child's K-12 education.	True	False
6. Most children do not have homework.	True	False
7. After-school activities, such as student government or a sports team, teach children how to get along with people and other life skills.	True	False
8. When family income is low, working is more important than school for young adults as well as adults.	True	False
9. Most people in the United States consider education to be a lifelong experience.	True	False
10. If you are working, you cannot go to school or a training program.	True	False
11. If an adult does not have a high school diploma, s/he can get a special high school diploma, called a <i>GED</i> .	True	False
12. Education after high school is free for everyone.	True	False
13. Adults who want to continue their education may be eligible for financial aid.	True	False