

You Can Do It!

Have you thought about going back to learning?



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Why take up learning?

Taking up learning can be a great way to:

- Get out and about, meet new people and make new friends.
- Learn about something that interests you.
- Develop your confidence and improve how you feel about yourself.
- Develop new skills and get qualifications.
- Develop life skills, like reading and writing.

Research shows that learning can have lots of benefits to physical and mental health. Learning centres (including colleges, adult education centres and other places like community centres and libraries) can be a great place to meet people, develop your interests and hear about social events.

Learning can offer stimulation and new challenges. Many people who take up learning as adults say it has given them increased confidence, self-worth and optimism for the future. Taking up learning can also open up new job opportunities.

What sort of learning could I do?

Whatever your situation, you should be able to find a learning course that's right for you. There is a wide range of subjects you could learn about, from computer courses to singing and from arts to reading and writing. Learning can happen at your own pace and at a time suitable to you. There are daytime, evening and distance learning courses available. There are short courses, part time and full time courses.

Adult learning is different from being at school – learning environments are more relaxed and friendly. Many learning centres offer taster sessions where you can go along and see what courses are available and try them out before signing up. Learning doesn't always have to be expensive and you might be able to get extra help to cover any fees (especially if you are on benefits). Find out more by contacting your local learning centre, or by visiting www.direct.gov.uk and selecting 'education and learning' and 'adult learning and skills'.

On taking up learning...

I thought learning would help me recover from my stroke and to cope with my mental health difficulties. I have been at the college for five years and have completed many different courses in computing, personal development and art. Through the courses, particularly the art courses, I have been able to express myself in new ways, which has been good as I have speech difficulties as a result of my stroke. The support worker in the college is always there to help and the tutors on the courses are friendly and nice which makes a big difference.

(George)

On the benefits of learning...

I started taking smaller classes with other people with mental health difficulties and have now moved onto larger courses and classes in the art department. Through coming to college I have made friends and regularly go on trips with other students as part of a college wide social group run by students with mental health difficulties or recovering from drug abuse. I have also had some of my artwork exhibited, my speech has improved and I feel more confident about trying new situations.

(George)

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On growing in confidence...

I wanted a purpose to my life, to get rid of a sense of inadequacy and feel useful. My confidence has improved so much... It's never too late to learn or develop new skills.

(Lynne)

Will anyone support me to take up learning?

Lots of colleges have set up support services for people who are returning to learning. Most colleges have a named person who specialises in offering advice and guidance to learners with mental health difficulties to ensure you find the right course for you. Telephone the college or visit their website to find out about this.

What are my rights?

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) protects the rights of disabled people (including people with mental health difficulties). The DDA says that all learning centres have to offer support and make changes (reasonable adjustments) to meet the needs of disabled learners. Learning centres cannot discriminate against disabled people. This means they cannot treat a person unfairly just because they are disabled.

If you tell your learning centre you have a mental health difficulty, they must offer support to help you with your learning. The sort of support a learning centre could offer might include:

- Help with planning your learning, such as planning to meet you regularly to help you to manage your workload.
- Help with planning assessments, such as making sure you can take breaks in the assessment or have extra time.

- Providing practical learning aids to support you, such as a Dictaphone, note taker or support worker in the classroom.
- Challenging and dealing with any negative or discriminatory actions of other staff or learners.
- Emotional support and encouragement, such as offering you an induction session or putting you in contact with a support worker.
- Making sure they keep in contact with you if you are ill or have a hospital admission and miss sessions.

If you're not sure whether you want to tell the learning centre you have a mental health difficulty, you might find it useful to read the leaflet 'Should I say?' You can find this on the Internet at:

www.niace.org.uk . If you don't have access to the Internet, go to your local library – most will let you use the Internet for free.

On meeting new people and not being isolated...

If you have never been housebound you won't know the feeling of isolation and eventually fear of going out and having to meet people. The learning centre has got me out, meeting new people who are all in the same boat, they all want to learn and age and disability don't count here... I can now meet people AND talk to them, I am very happy and I'm learning... Learning takes your mind off your problems; it keeps you engaged and motivated.

(Sheila)

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What can I do now?

- Have a think about what you would like to learn and what kind of support would help you to learn. What sort of things do you enjoy? What sort of things are you good at? Is there anything you have always wanted to learn about?
- Talk to a friend or support worker to get their help and encouragement.
- Contact your local college or adult education centre and make an appointment to talk to a support worker who can offer advice. They might be called a 'learning support manager' or 'mental health coordinator'. They should help you to find the right learning opportunity for you.
- If you don't feel comfortable talking to the college directly, look them up on the Internet. This can help you find out what sorts of course are available. Most libraries will let you use the Internet for free.
- Don't be afraid to give something new a try – you might look back and realise it's the best thing you've ever done!

On the benefits of learning...

My support worker suggested going to college to help me with my depression and isolation. I started a confidence-building course a year ago and have now completed three different courses. I was surprised that the college offered so many courses and I could attend small classes for people like myself not ready for larger classes. I've had problems in my personal life – if I didn't have the support and experience of the courses I wouldn't have dealt with it in the same [positive] way. The courses have made a huge difference to my condition... in my confidence to talk to people, to just do things.

(Natalie)

Other places to contact

- Contact your local college, adult education centre or library. Find their details in the phone book.
- The Careers Advice Service gives information and advice to help adults make decisions about learning or work opportunities.

Web: www.direct.gov.uk/careersadvice

Telephone: 0800 100900

- Nextstep support people aged 20 and over into learning and work. They have drop in centres around England where you can get advice and support.

Web: www.nextstep.org.uk

Contact your local learning provider:

On getting support at the learning centre...

I have had contact with the college support worker who helped me a lot in the start. I know the support is there for when I need it, which is a relief. It's important to realise that you are not just going to get thrown into college – support is available specific to your needs and it's always there if you want it.

(Natalie)