

Designing Education That Drives Behavior Change in Older Adults

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Learning Outcomes

- Analyze factors contributing to ineffective patient education in older adults, including health literacy, ageism, and social determinants of health
- Discriminate between intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence learning and behavior change in older adult patients
- Distinguish between health literacy limitations, cognitive impairment, sensory deficits, and generational influences when designing individualized patient education strategies
- Apply principles of adult learning theory and behavior change science to enhance patient engagement and self-efficacy
- Prepare patient education strategies that incorporate caregiver engagement, technology, and practical system considerations to improve outcomes

Why This Matters

- Every day, clinicians educate patients with the hope that knowledge will lead to action. Yet many patients leave understanding what to do but never incorporate it into daily life.
- **71%** of adults over age 60 had difficulty using print materials.



The Education Paradox

“

We don't have an information problem.

We have a behavior change problem.

”

Meet GiGi...

“I’ve managed just fine my whole life.”



GiGi's Care Journey

Home



Hip fracture



Hospitalization



Rehabilitation



Home again



**No lasting
behavior change**



What happened?

Course Roadmap

**Define why
education
fails**



**Understand
the learner**



**Design
education for
behavior
change**

Chapter 1

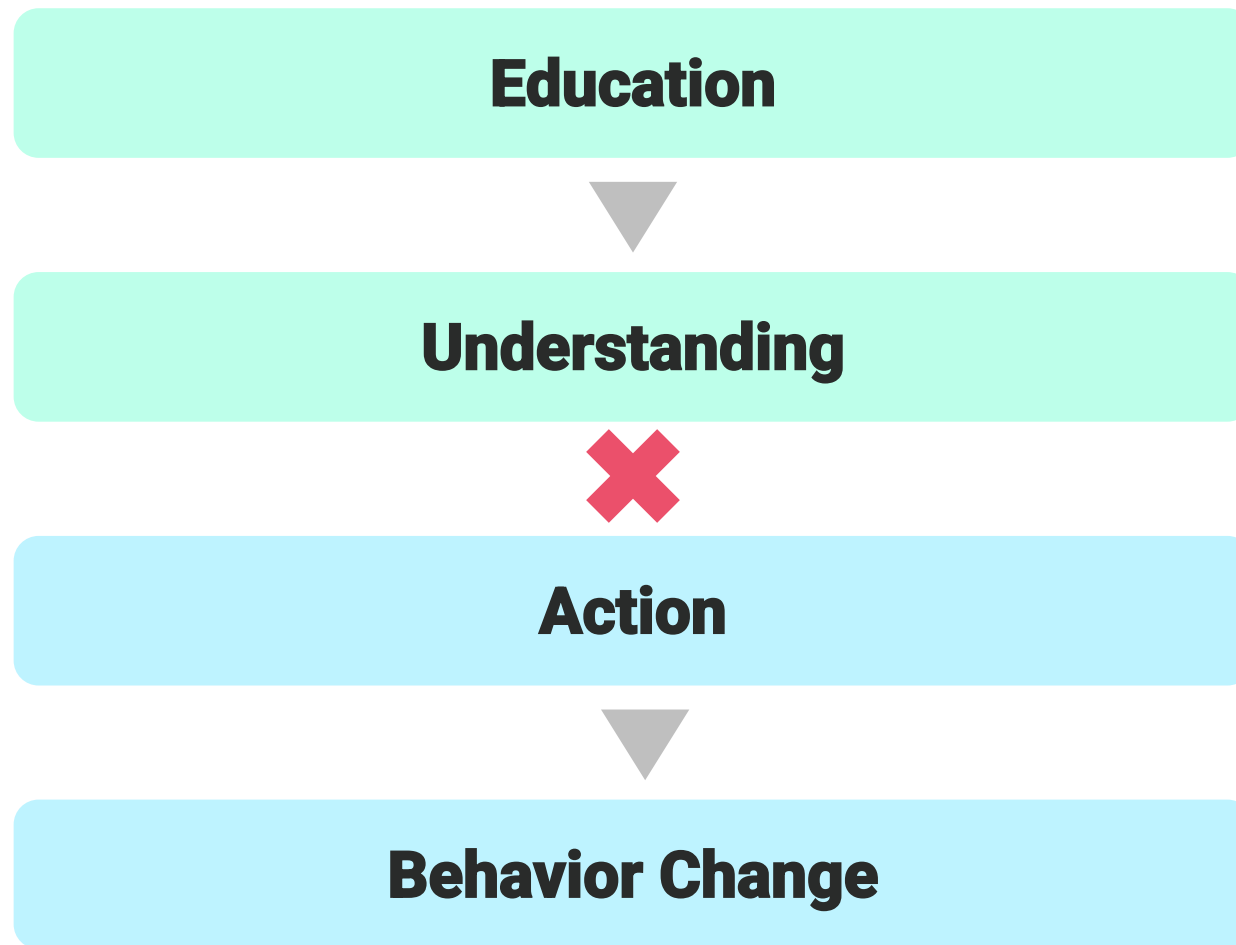
Defining the Problem: Why Education Fails



We've All Been There...

- “I know they understood.”
- “They could repeat it back.”
- “They agreed with the plan.”
- “So why didn't anything change?”

When Does Patient Education Fail?



1. Zhang et al., 2024

2. VanDerVeer et al., 2021

Education $\neq$ Behavior Change

“

Knowledge is necessary.

Knowledge is not sufficient.

”

Why We Default to “Noncompliance”

We Observe

- Didn't do HEP
- Missed visits
- Doesn't use walker
- Stops exercises

We Assume

- Low motivation
- Doesn't care
- Noncompliant
- Doesn't understand

The Compliance Trap

- **Behavior is an outcome, not a personality trait**
 - When behavior doesn't change, our first question shouldn't be
 - "What's wrong with this patient?"
 - It should be
 - **"What barriers are preventing change?"**

Let's Revisit GiGi

- Pain?
- Fear?
- Hearing?
- Memory?
- Confidence?
- Health literacy?
- Caregiver support?
- Home environment?

Chapter Summary

- Education is more than giving information
- Understanding does not guarantee behavior change
- “Noncompliance” rarely explains the whole story
- Lasting behavior change requires understanding the learner

Chapter 2

Understanding the Older Adult Learner

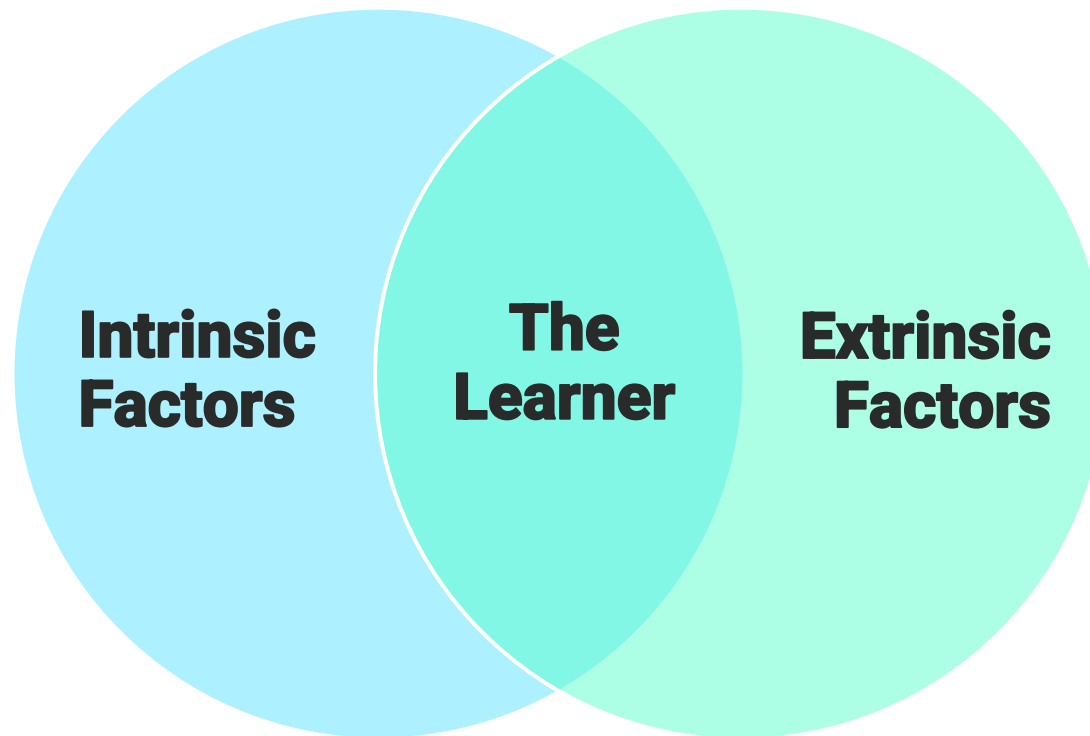


Why Didn't GiGi Change?

Was she unwilling, or was she facing barriers we never recognized?



The Learning Environment



1. Quiben et al., 2025

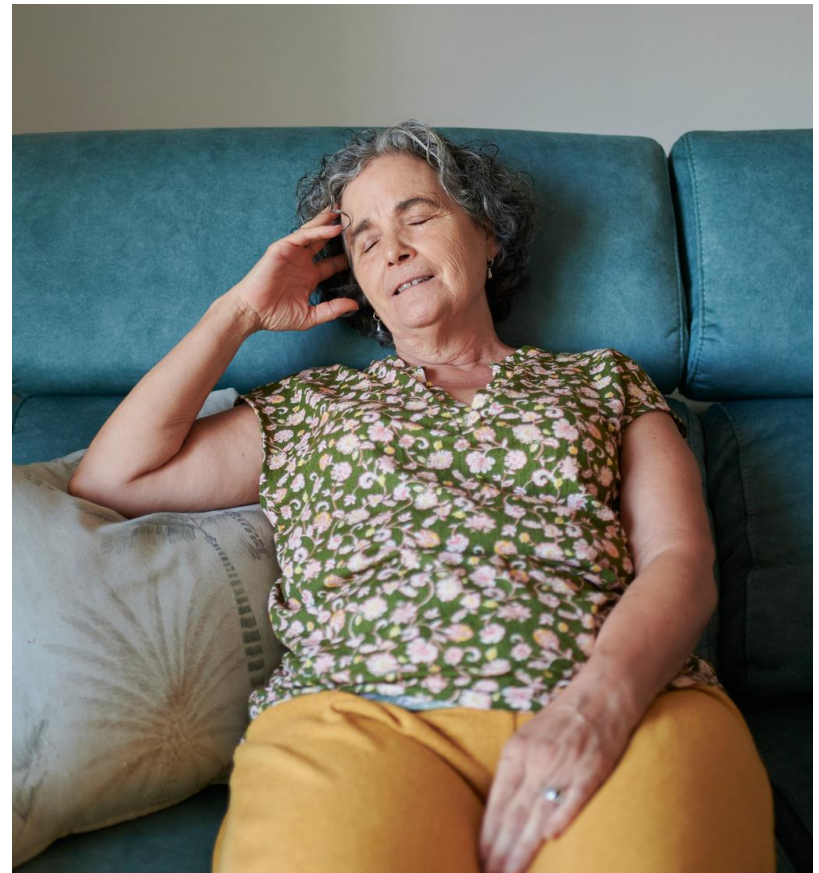
2. Zhang et al., 2024

We Teach People, Not Diagnoses

Same diagnosis. Different learner.



1. Quiben et al., 2025



2. Zhang et al., 2024

What Does Every Learner Bring?

Assets

- Life experiences
- Generational experiences
- Values
- Routines
- Previous successes
- Motivation
- Support

Barriers

- Pain
- Fear
- Memory
- Vision
- Hearing
- Health literacy

1. Quiben et al., 2025

2. Zhang et al., 2024

Thought Exercise



Generational Context Shapes Learning

- **Experiences may influence**
 - Communication expectations
 - Trust and authority
 - Technology comfort
 - Family roles
 - Learning preferences
- **Generational patterns offer clues, not prescriptions**

Intrinsic Factors

How Aging Changes Learning

- Processing speed
- Attention
- Working memory
- Executive function

Aging Exists on a Continuum

Normal Aging

- Slower processing
- Learns with repetition
- Independent

Mild Cognitive Impairment

- Mild memory problems
- Benefits from cues
- Mostly independent

Dementia

- Progressive decline
- Requires caregiver support
- Increasing dependence

Health Literacy ≠ Cognitive Impairment

Health Literacy

- Difficulty understanding health information
- Often hidden
- Can improve with communication

Cognitive Impairment

- Difficulty processing or remembering information
- Often recognized
- Requires adapted learning strategies

Can They Access the Education?

Vision



Hearing



Lighting



Background Noise



Reading Level



Confidence Drives Behavior

- Knowledge answers
 - **“What should I do?”**
- Confidence answers
 - **“Can I actually do it?”**



**Even the most motivated learner
can struggle...**

**...if the environment works
against them**

Extrinsic Factors

The Environment Teaches Too

- Home setup
- Lighting
- Family
- Noise
- Competing priorities
- Fatigue

Caregivers as Learning Partners

- Not a replacement
- Partnership

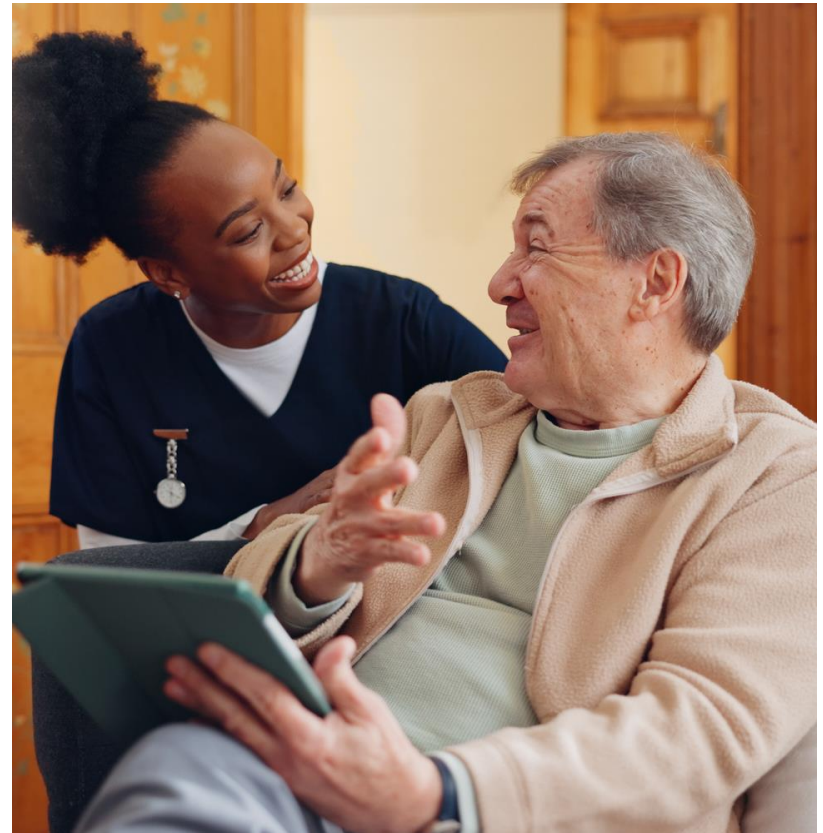


Social Determinants Shape Learning

- Transportation
- Income
- Living alone
- Neighborhood
- Access

Technology: Bridge or Barrier?

- Patient portal
- Video reminders
- RTM
- Large-font apps
- Closed captions

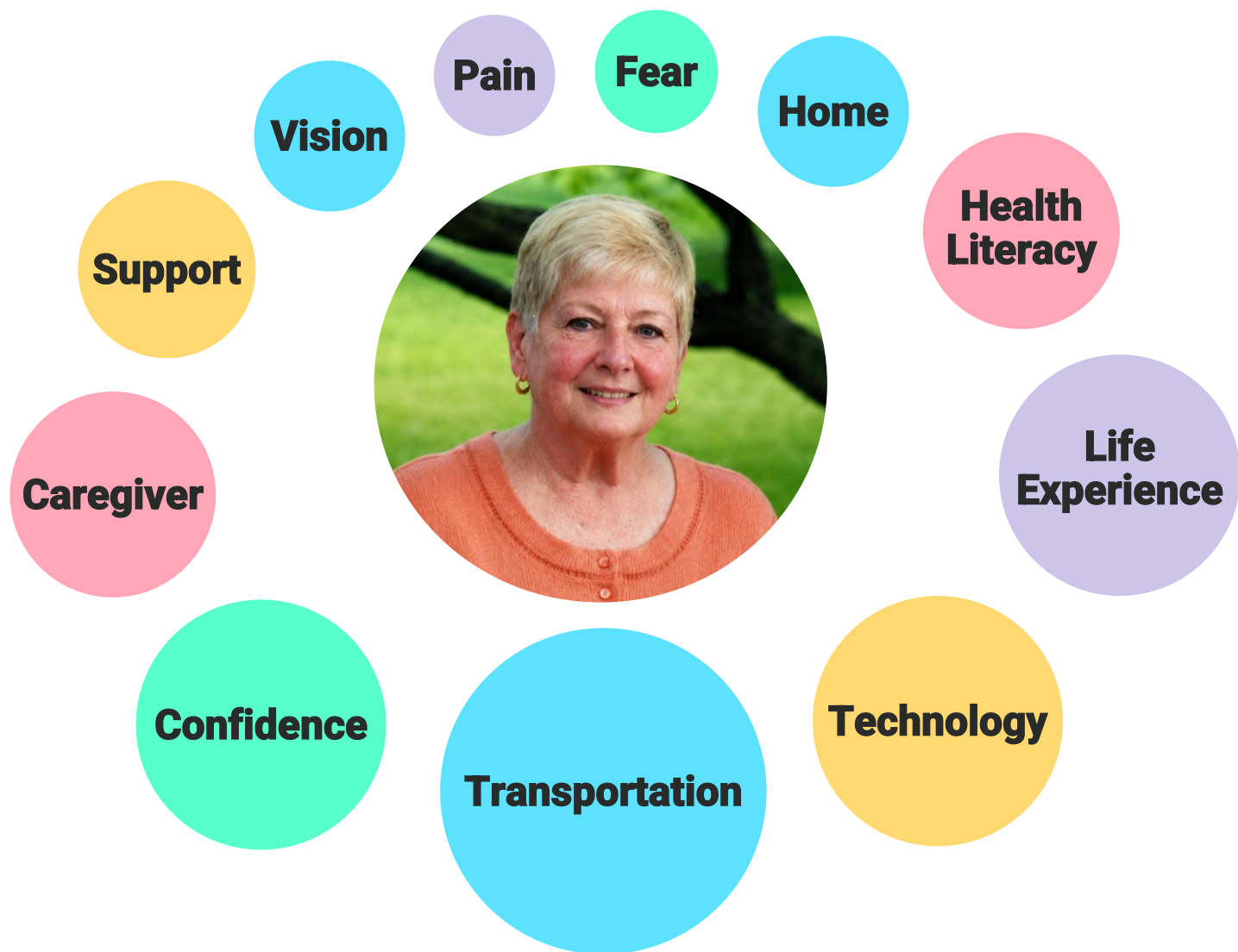


1. Mace et al., 2022

2. Chu et al., 2022

3. Mitzner et al., 2010

Looking at GiGi Differently



Chapter Summary

- Great educators become great observers
 - Every learner brings strengths
 - Every learner faces barriers
 - Intrinsic and extrinsic factors interact
 - Understanding the learner comes before designing education

Chapter 3

Designing Education for Behavior Change



What Changes Now?

“

**Once we understand the learner,
we must change how we teach.**

”

From Information Delivery to Behavior Design

Traditional Education

- Explain
- Tell
- Demonstrate
- Give handout
- Verify understanding

Behavior-Focused Education

- Engage
- Ask
- Practice
- Build routine
- Support action

1. Niksadat et al., 2022

2. Zhang et al., 2024

Behavior Change Starts With Connection

- Adult learning principles
- People are more likely to change behavior when education is
 - Relevant
 - Respectful
 - Practical
 - Immediately useful
 - Collaborative

1. Niksadat et al., 2022

2. Baumgartner et al., 2024

Ask Before You Teach

- Questions like
 - What matters most to you?
 - What worries you?
 - What have you tried?
 - What has worked before?
 - What gets in the way?
 - How do you prefer to receive information?
- **Notice I haven't educated them yet**

Success Builds Confidence



Teach Less. Practice More.

- Don't spend ten minutes explaining
- Spend two minutes explaining
- Then spend eight minutes practicing

Teach-Back Isn't a Test

- It's a mirror
- Instead of
 - **“Tell me what I just said.”**
- Use
 - **“I want to make sure I explained that clearly.”**



Caregivers as Coaches

- Not substitute learners
- Partners



1. Sanjuán et al., 2023

2. Albanesi et al., 2023

Technology That Supports Learning

- Videos
- Reminders
- RTM
- Apps
- QR codes
- Closed captions

1. Mantena & Keshavjee, 2021 2. Mace et al., 2022

3. Chu et al., 2022

Make Success Easy

- Habit stacking
- Environmental cues
- Small wins
- Simple routines
- Visual reminders
- Reduced friction

GiGi Revisited

Before: Education-Centered

- Tell her what she needs to do
- Give the recommendations
- Explain and demonstrate
- Give written instructions
- Have family remind/correct
- Hope it carries over

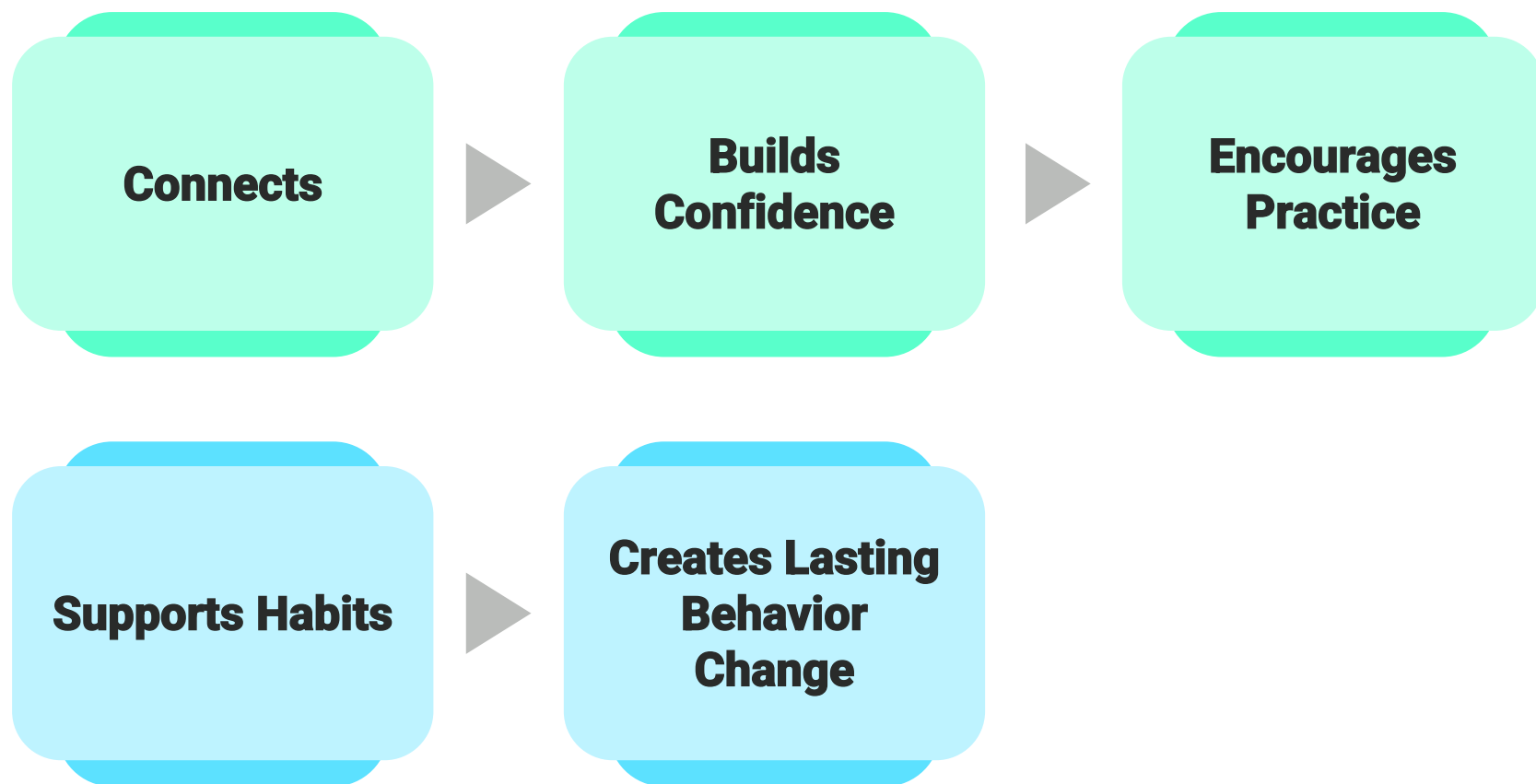


Now: Learner-Centered

- Ask what matters to her
- Prioritize what matters now
- Practice and build success
- Design supports she will use
- Help family support autonomy
- Build it into her life

Same patient. Different education.

Chapter Summary: Design Education That



Same Patient. Different Lens.



Course Summary

- Education isn't about giving better instructions
- It's about creating the conditions for behavior change

Question & Answer Session



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- Financial
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5-Minute Break

Remember to submit your questions for the question and answer session!



10-Minute Break

Remember to submit your questions for the question and answer session!



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