

Informal Learning

Fact Sheet



What is Informal Learning?

Informal learning is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities, and through the interests and activities of individuals. Informal learning may or may not be intentional and have defined goals.

“Informal learning for adults is like the submerged portion of an iceberg: seldom seen but essential to supporting the visible part.” (2, p. vii)

Why is informal learning important?

- Over 90% of Canadian adults are involved in informal learning activities that they consider significant to them.⁽³⁾
- On average, Canadians spend about 15 hours per week to informal learning activities, more than the average of about 3 hours per week in organized education courses.⁽³⁾
- Almost 75% of overall training in a typical Canadian establishment takes the form of informal training; informal training is also the dominant form of training even in companies that provide formal training.⁽⁴⁾
- Participation in informal learning does not decline with age.⁽¹⁾
- While almost everyone engages in passive informal learning that is incidental to everyday life, participation in informal learning that is active and intentional is strongly related to education and skill levels.⁽⁵⁾
- In the workplace, individuals with high skills and in high-engagement jobs are more likely to participate in informal learning activities than those with lower skill levels or in low-engagement jobs.⁽⁶⁾

How does it enrich people’s lives?

- For adults who are employed or soon to be employed, about 6 hours per week on average are devoted to learning related to work. This includes computer learning, new job tasks, problem solving and communication skills, occupational health and safety, and learning new technologies.⁽³⁾
- Over 40% of Canadians spend about 4 hours per week on informal learning related to their community, including developing interpersonal, communication, and organizational/managerial skills, and learning about social issues.⁽³⁾
- About 80% of Canadians spend about 5 hours per week on learning related to household needs, including home renovation and gardening, maintenance, and cooking.⁽³⁾
- About 90% of Canadians spend about 6 hours per week on learning related to general interests and hobbies. This includes learning about health/well-being, environmental issues, finances, and miscellaneous issues related to their hobbies, public and social issues, computers, and sports and recreation.⁽³⁾
- Informal learning provides cultural connections to families, neighbourhoods and workplaces.⁽⁷⁾
- Learners can use their skills in informal settings to enhance and support skills they are developing in the classroom.⁽⁷⁾

References

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