

Using Teach-back in Practice for Different Professions or Settings: Lead-ins and Questions to Assist with Understanding



All members of the health team can improve equity, quality, safety, and experience of care and services through use of teach-back. Here are examples of lead-ins, non-shaming open-ended questions, and [Taking Responsibility](#) lines that can be used by various health team members to help reveal what patients, family caregivers, and clients may not fully understand. Recognizing the roles and expertise of each team member contributes to [Interprofessional Collaboration](#) to ensure people understand all aspects of their care.

Approaches for Any Health Team Member Using Teach-back

- Plan your teach-back ahead of time. Use the [10 Elements for Using Teach-back Effectively](#) to guide you in thinking through the [Need-to-Know](#) or -do information you are responsible for conveying. Plan for language access assistance beforehand and talk with interpreters about using teach-back. The information provided to patients, families, and clients varies by health team member role. But everyone must convey it clearly and check to be sure it is understood.

Examples include:

- Dental hygienists explaining brushing and flossing technique.
- Dentists, physicians, and advanced practitioners describing diagnosis and treatment plans, and engaging in informed consent discussions.
- Dietitians summarizing which foods to avoid or which to eat more of.
- Housekeeping, facilities, and transportation staff showing how to operate technology or other items and explaining that they will make sure patients' and families' questions are answered.
- Nurses providing hospital discharge, clinic homegoing, or post-operative care information.
- Organizational leaders, administrators, and managers addressing patient, family, and client concerns and questions.
- Pharmacists describing medicine dosing, side effects, and drug interactions.
- Respiratory therapists reviewing asthma action plans.
- Scheduling and registration staff reviewing timing and preparation for appointments or procedures.
- Social workers conveying steps for applying for services and benefits.
- Speech, occupational, and physical therapists explaining how to do activities or exercises.
- X-ray and laboratory staff clarifying what will be done, timing, and positioning.

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Approaches for Any Health Team Member Using Teach-back (continued)

- Prompt yourself to recognize and pause any time you find yourself about to ask “Do you have any questions?” or “Does this make sense?” Substitute introductory and [Taking Responsibility](#) phrases like:
 - What questions do you have?
 - This was a lot of information. I want to make sure I explained it well to you.
 - I want to be sure I did a good job and did not miss anything.
 - I want to be sure I was clear when I went over that. To be sure, can you please explain that back to me using your own words?
 - To be sure I was clear, could you please show me how you will do this at home?
- Think about how you can build teach-back in at multiple points:
 - Within an encounter—using small teach-backs throughout your discussion, not just at the end.
 - During a longer stay—through repeated contacts on multiple days or interactions, e.g., for self-management and safety information, and discharge preparation from a hospital or rehabilitation facility.

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Experienced Teams Share Examples

Clinical Roles

Physician/Advanced Practitioner

- Ask people what they:
 - Think of treatment choices you discussed.
 - See as the advantages and risks of each treatment option to best meet their needs.
- After discussing medicine changes and food interactions, show you are taking responsibility for being clear:
 - We've covered quite a bit of information and I want to be sure I was clear since this will affect how well the medicines will work for you.
 - o So could you please go over the changes you'll make to the foods you eat, using your own words?

Then use teach-back again to check for understanding about when they will take their medicines.

- This is Chunk-and-Check: separating multiple topics; identifying the two to three most important points for each; clearly explaining those; and confirming understanding with teach-back before moving on to the next.
- After reviewing their asthma action plan, ask the patient to refer to the plan to tell you what they will do if they are coughing more and feeling short of breath.

Dermatologist

- After introducing a new topical medicine, use teach-back:
 - Since this medicine can irritate your skin, I want to make sure I explained how to use it clearly. Can you go over:
 - o How often you will use it?
 - o How much you will apply?
 - o And how you will know if you should cut back on how often you put it on your face?

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Experienced Teams Share Examples (continued)

Health Professions Faculty Member

- When precepting a student or trainee and while confirming a patient was cared for appropriately, teach-back can provide an efficient way to role model use of teach-back and to assess patient or family caregiver understanding.
 - Try this approach as you introduce yourself and your role when wrapping up an encounter. Ask “Could you please tell me what _student or trainee name__ told you about next steps in your care?”

Dentist

- Use teach-back to confirm understanding of the risks and benefits associated with two treatment choices.
- After something new has been explained by another member of the team, like a bridge or prescription mouthwash, ask “What questions do you have for me about the instructions the assistant gave you?”

Oral Surgeon or Care Team

- Ask the patient to teach back:
 - Instructions for managing medicines, oral rinse, and foods or hot beverages to avoid.
 - Where on the take-home instructions they can find the emergency number to call; reasons why they may need that number; office hours; and where to call after hours.
 - Instructions for bleeding and what to watch for.

Dental Hygienist

- After teaching brushing and flossing technique, or providing post-treatment instructions, ask patients to teach or show back:
 - Duration, frequency, and how they will brush and floss their teeth.
 - Instructions for caring for their gums, especially after treatments or surgery.
- As you conclude, ask “What questions do you have?”

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Experienced Teams Share Examples (continued)

Post-op Care Team

- Ask patients to:
 - Tell you in their own words which symptoms they should report to the doctor after the surgery or procedure; who they should call at which number; and when to schedule the next visit, if any.
 - Tell you what worries they have or what will be hard about doing wound care or obtaining or using assistive or other devices.
 - Show you how they will do recommended activities and state in their own words how often and for how long. If the patient is still sleepy from anesthesia, ask the family caregiver.

Respiratory Therapist

- Ask patients to:
 - Explain how they use their peak flow meter at home, and what the results mean.
 - Show how they use their COPD inhaler.
 - Describe:
 - o When they will use their COPD medicines.
 - o When and how they would know to call the doctor right away or go to the hospital for severe breathing problems.
- Pediatric example:
 - Child's Parent or Caregiver:
 - o To make sure everyone who watches Serena knows how to help her with her controller medicine—the one that keeps her asthma from acting up—could you please show me what you will teach them, using your own words?
 - Child (~8+ years old):
 - o To make sure I've done a good job teaching you how to use the medicine that helps keep you from wheezing, can you show me how you will use it.... say, if you are staying overnight with a friend?
 - o To make sure I was clear, can you please tell me when you will use your controller medicine?

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Experienced Teams Share Examples (continued)

Non-clinical Roles

Registration

- Create a welcoming environment so it is easy for clients to ask for help with language, hearing, vision, or other challenges.
- Identify people's preferred language and know how to access and work with qualified interpreters.
- Tell appropriate team members of any concerns about a person's understanding or struggles to teach back.

Check-out and Scheduling

- When making appointments, provide upcoming visit details, reminders, and a call with the day, date, time, and location of the visit.
 - Offer choices for how they receive these: appointment card; patient portal; text; mobile or home phone.
- If people put details in their phone or other device, ask them to read the entry back, and explain you are checking to make sure they have the right information, since it's easy to enter the wrong numbers.
- Ask how they will get to their appointment so you can help provide transportation support if that is a problem.
- Give arrival and parking information.

Community Food and Support Centers

- Ask what the person is interested in learning about for their needs or preferences, like:
 - Help with healthy food choices and access.
 - Recipes for using the foods they are interested in.
 - Help they would like to have for services like transportation, utilities, housing, internet access, or health care.
 - How to sign up for other programs or credible internet-based information sites, especially those with plain language resources like [Medline Plus](#), or offices they need to visit to enroll in a benefit.
- Use teach-back to be sure they understand and can find the key information on hand-outs they are given.

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