

Wisconsin Public Psychiatry Network Teleconference (WPPNT)

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Plain Language Matters: Engage and Empower Clients



Cultural Linguistic Services
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Plain Language in Action



Listen to the 1st example.

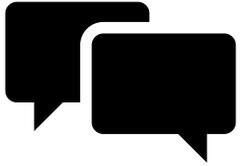




Plain Language in Action



Listen to the 2nd example.



Answer in the chat.

- What differences did you notice between the 2 versions?



Plain Language

Plain Language is communication your audience **understands the first time** they read or hear it.





Defined by Results



Find



Understand



Use



Health Literacy

- **9 out of 10 adults** struggle to use health information with unfamiliar or complex terms.
- We can improve health literacy if we practice clear communication strategies.

Clear communication:

- means presenting health information using ideas, words, numbers, and images that make sense to the people who need the information.
- builds trust with your audience. **When your audience trusts you, they're more likely to follow your recommendations.**



Demands on Patients

- Complex healthcare system
- Unfamiliar jargon
- Conceptual understanding of risks versus benefits
- Use of scales
 - pain: 1-10
 - readiness: not at all (0) - very (10)
 - measures (kg, cm)
- Decision making under unusual circumstances
- Comfort with asking questions versus questioning authority



Patients with Low Health Literacy

May struggle with:

- remembering detailed instructions or health history
- providing detailed information
- implementing treatment plans
- weighing risks and benefits to make important decisions
- believing that they can affect their health outcomes
- recognizing relationship between lifestyle factors and health outcomes



Patient - Provider Perspectives

Providers may feel patients:

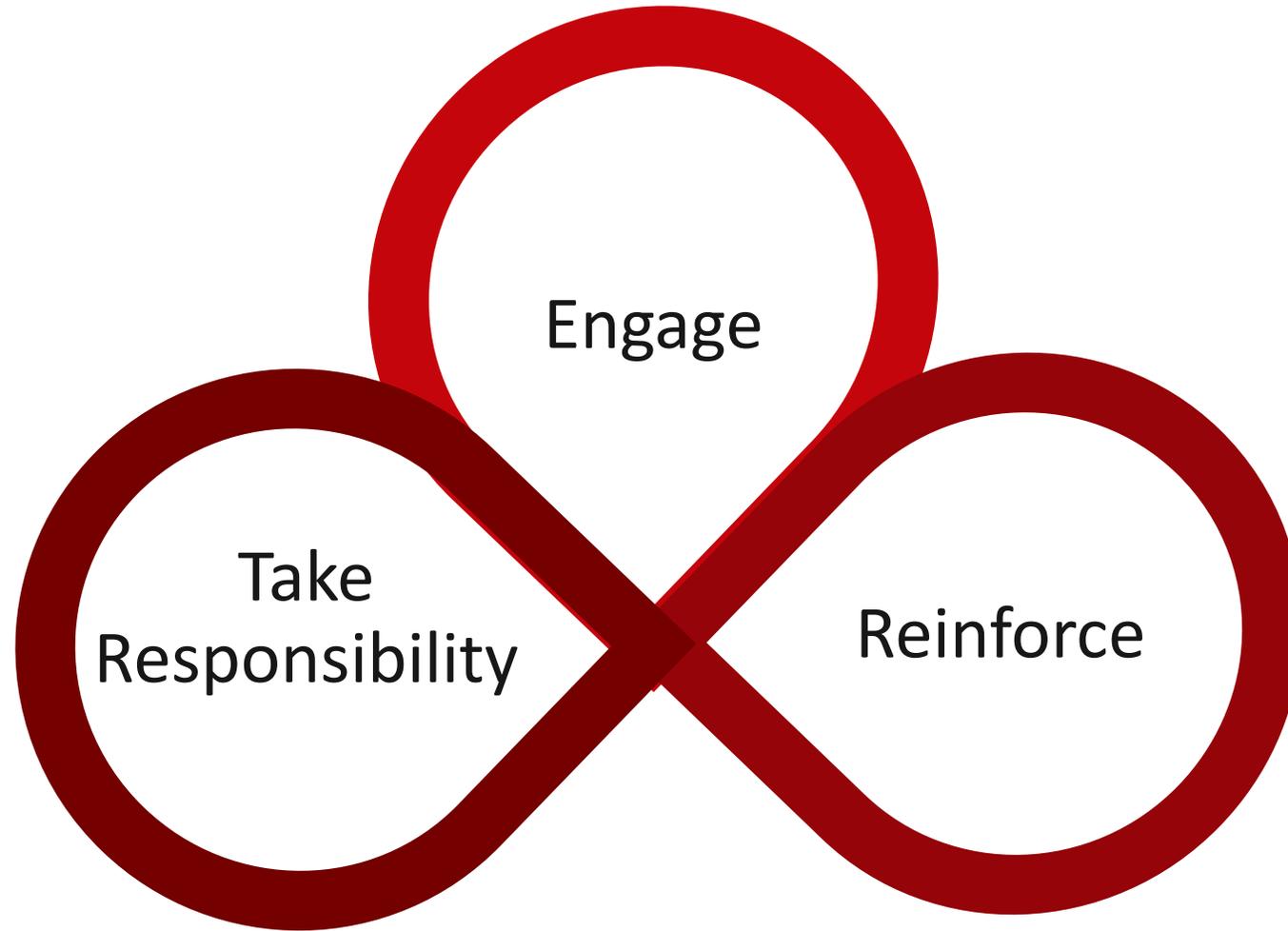
- are passive in conversations or don't participate in decision-making
- give incomplete personal health information
- don't ask questions
- don't follow-through with treatment plans
- are less likely to use preventative care

Patients may feel providers didn't:

- give them information in a way they could understand
- ask for their opinion
- listen to them
- explain why they need specific information



Speak in Plain Language



Know Your Listener



Know your listener, so you can anticipate their needs and challenges:

- Who is my listener?
- What do I need them to do?
- Why is it important (to them)?
- What are their goals?
- What questions might they have?



Kleinman's 8 Questions

1. What do you call the problem?
2. What do you think has caused the problem?
3. Why do you think it started when it did?
4. What do you think the sickness does? How does it work?
5. How severe is the sickness? Will it have a long or a short course?
6. What kind of treatment do you think the patient should receive?
7. What are the chief problems the sickness has caused?
8. What do you fear most about the sickness?



Create an Environment for Success

- ❑ Don't assume prior knowledge
- ❑ Don't rush – your listener doesn't hear your message as often as you say it
- ❑ Take short talking turns - present information with a pause in between
- ❑ Deliver your message around the AskMe3! Initiative
 1. What is my main problem?
 2. What do I need to do about it?
 3. Why is it important for me to do this?



Waterfall Chat

- We'll look at 2 examples.
- Look at the 1st example and think about possible challenges.
- Write 1-2 challenges in the chat, but **don't send**.
- Only send when I say to. 😊



Addiction is often a chronic condition that can involve cycles of relapse and recovery. Some individuals are able to maintain sobriety through behavioral changes, support networks, and lifestyle adjustments. Others benefit from medication-assisted treatment, counseling, or structured recovery programs. To ensure quality care, it is important that we have your cooperation with regard to treatment adherence, follow-up appointments, and engagement.



Waterfall Chat

- Now, we'll look at the 2nd example.
- What differences do you see between the examples?
- Write 1-2 differences in the chat, but **don't send**.
- Only send when I say to. 😊



I'm glad you're here. Managing addiction is not easy, but you are not alone. Together, we'll find the right support for you. We'll talk about groups, counseling, medication, and other treatment programs.

First, can you tell me what things have you already tried? [follow up questions based on answer]

Thank you for sharing. I always need to know what you think and how you feel. Please tell me when you have questions or worries about anything I say.

We'll meet every week. Please come to all your appointments. I need to see you often, so we can make the best plan for you.

Next week, what support options would you like to talk about first? [answer] Thank you. That's very helpful to know.

We talked about a lot today. I want to make sure I did a good job explaining everything. Can you tell me 2 things you can do as we work together to find the best support for you?

Engage and Motivate



- Engage with personal pronouns
- Use a positive, conversational tone
- Choose familiar words and numbers
- Tell your listener what they need to do first... then why it's important (to them)
- Clarify with active voice
- Simplify - use fewer words and shorter sentences
- Speak in bullets (short statements followed by a 1 second pause)



Use Familiar Words

The CDC Style Guide Says...

Replace jargon words with their plain language alternatives. For **example:**

Avoid:

acquired
detrimental
following
frequently
in the event of
initial
regarding
sufficient

Use:

get
harmful
after
often
if
first
about
enough

Use the Familiar Numbers



Eighty-one percent of children ages 6 months to 6 years watch TV or videos for about 1.96 hours a day.

8 out of 10 children ages 6 months to 6 years watch TV or videos for about 2 hours a day.

You came to 75% of your sessions this month.

You came to 3 out of your 4 sessions this month.

There is a 1% risk of getting a serious side effect.

1 out of 100 people gets a serious side effect. This means that you have a very low risk of getting a serious side effect.



Explain the Numbers

The amount of meat recommended as part of a healthy meal is 3 to 4 ounces.

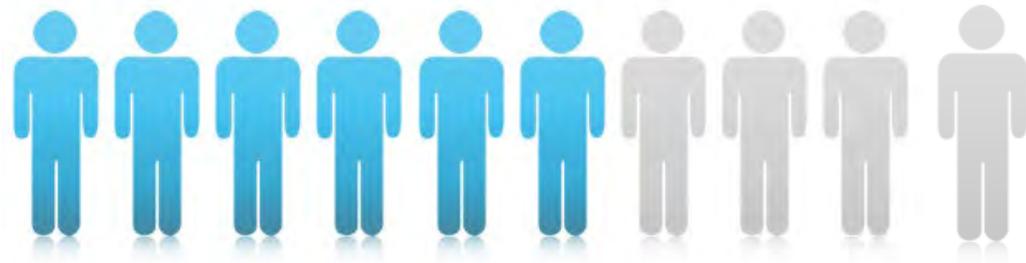
During a meal, eat 3-4 ounces of meat - about the size of a deck of cards.

Your PHQ-9 score is 18, indicating moderate depression.

You scored an 18 on this assessment. That means your depression symptoms are affecting your daily life.

About 60% of patients respond to this antidepressant.

About 6 out of 10 people feel better when they take this medication.





Explain Results Clearly

Your rapid urine drug screen was positive. This means there were amphetamines in your urine.

Your culture was positive. This means you have strep throat.

Your claim was rejected. This means we don't have all the information we need. You can fix this by submitting all required information.

Use Active Voice



Passive Voice

New, sterile needles should be used every time.

by zombies



Active Voice

Use new needles every time.



Reinforce Your Message

- ❑ Start and end with the most important information
- ❑ Pause
- ❑ Use body language (gestures, facial expressions, modeling)
- ❑ Use meaningful example and visuals
 - pictures, diagrams, maps
 - physical space and items around you
 - written reminders

Take Ownership of Understanding



Ask open-ended wh-questions

- “Do you take your medication in the morning?” vs “When do you take your medication?”

Avoid tag questions

- “You take your medication in the morning, **right?**”
- “You don’t smoke, **do you?**”

Avoid negative questions

- “Aren’t you taking your medication in the morning?”
- “Didn’t you quit smoking?”

Encourage questions

- “Do you have questions?” vs “What questions do you have for me?”



Use Teach-back

After reviewing treatment options

“I gave you a lot of information today. I want to make sure I did a good explaining all your options. When you talk to your family, what will you tell them about your different treatment options?”

After making medication changes

“We made a couple changes to your medications today, which can be really hard to remember. I want to make sure I did a good job explaining everything. Can you show me on this calendar when you will take your medications?”



Practice Plain Language

- Review the plain language resources that we email you after the training
- Visit <https://digital.gov/guides/plain-language>
- Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/health-literacy/>
- Create a list of your team's acronyms and jargon...and consider plain language alternatives
- Edit 1 important or common message and get feedback from users

Thank you

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