

## Ask-Tell-Ask

An Effective Way to Give Information and Advice

21 September 2016

Ask-Tell-Ask (also called Elicit-Provide-Elicit) uses the principles and Spirit of Motivational Interviewing to increase the chances that people will be ready, willing, and able to act on information or advice. Choose from the options below or use the space to write down the phrase that fits best for you.

Step	Options, Tips and Examples
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASK #1</b> for 1) permission <i>OR</i> 2) what they know or want to know</p>	<p><b>Option 1: Permission to give information and advice:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "Would it be all right if we talked about...?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "Would you like to know more about...?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "There is something I noticed that I'd like to tell you about, would it be okay if we talked about..."</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <p><b>Option 2: What they already know or want to know:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "What do you know about...?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "There are several things we could talk about, where should we start?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "It's time to talk about what you will do when you leave. What do you know about (this treatment, these resources, etc.)?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "What would you most like to know about...?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "What information can I help you with?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "You've already got a lot of information and experience with ....., but are there any questions that you have now that we should talk about?"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul> <p><b>Special cases: Legal, professional or organizational obligation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A topic you must discuss: "There's something I need to tell you/I noticed in your lab tests/screening results/questionnaire and I wonder what you will think about it."</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A reporting requirement: "As you know, our conversations are confidential, but there is an important exception. The law requires me to report.... I want our work together to be helpful, and I want to be sure you understand this responsibility I have."</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A professional obligation: "As your physician/counsellor/etc, I'm very concerned about..."</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A rule: "There are some important things to know about..."</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>TELL</b> information respectfully, clearly, and in small amounts</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make it <b>relevant</b> and focused on the <b>present</b>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "You mentioned that right now... is on your mind."</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Provide the information in a <b>neutral</b> way. The purpose is to <b>inform, not persuade</b>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "Let's look at the (questionnaire/survey/screening) results together..."</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "People in situations similar to this sometimes..."</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. <b>Focus</b> on one or two key messages that people want to know. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> "There are two key things of concern right now..."</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Use <b>plain language</b> (short sentences, familiar words, arranged logically)</li> <li>5. Use <b>pictures</b> and <b>figures</b> when they are helpful.</li> </ol>

Step	Options, Tips and Examples
	<p>6. Emphasize <b>choice</b> and <b>options</b> by avoiding words like “can’t,” “must,” or “have to.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “There are three choices about where to go from here...”</li> </ul> <p>Your notes here about TELL:</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASK #2</b></p> <p>1) what they thought <i>OR</i> 2) use teach-back to achieve understanding</p>	<p><b>Option 1: What they thought:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “What do you think about that?”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “I wonder what this all means to you?”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “I wonder how you think we might best proceed?”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <p><b>Option 2: Use teach-back to achieve understanding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “I’d like to make sure I did a good job explaining. Would you mind telling it back to me so I know I was clear?”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “When you go home, someone may ask you what we talked about today. What are you going to tell them?”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “Can you show me how you are going to (use this equipment/complete this form/....) so I know that I was able to explain it well?”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>

### People ask me for advice, can’t I just tell them what to do?

Be cautious when giving advice, because you can fall into the expert trap! The expert trap is when you give people advice based solely on your expertise and it doesn’t fit their circumstances, so it can be easily dismissed.

Here are two things to remember when asked for advice:

1. **Emphasize choice.**
  - “I can’t tell you what to do, but I can tell you what others have done.”
  - “Something you could try if you wish is...”
2. Instead of offering one piece of advice or a single solution, **offer a menu of options.** This is a special kind of Ask-Tell-Ask, sometimes called a behavioural menu.
  1. **ASK:** “Would you like to hear some ideas others have used or that might fit your situation?”
  2. **TELL:** Share two or three ideas all at once. Use the last idea to prompt for one of their own. “Some things you might try are \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ or maybe you have an idea of your own that occurs to you now.”
  3. **ASK** if any of these ideas might work.

