

Ask-Tell-Ask

An Effective Way to Give Information and Advice

16 October 2017

Ask-Tell-Ask (also called Elicit-Provide-Elicit) uses the 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 what fits best for you.

Step	Options, Tips and Examples
<p>ASK #1 for 1) permission <i>OR</i> 2) what they know or want to know</p>	<p>Option 1: Permission to give information and advice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "Is it ok if we talk about . . .?" <input type="checkbox"/> "Would you like to know more about . . .?" <input type="checkbox"/> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>OR</i></p> <p>Option 2: What they already know or want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "What do you know about . . .?" <input type="checkbox"/> "There are several things we could talk about, where should we start?" <input type="checkbox"/> "What information can I help you with?" <input type="checkbox"/> "You already know a lot about . . . , but are there any questions you still have?" <p><i>* For information about what to do when you have an obligation or people ask for information, see side two</i></p>
<p>TELL information respectfully, clearly, and in small amounts</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make sure it fits the person and is focused on the present. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "You said that . . . is on your mind right now." 2. Provide the information in a neutral way. The purpose is to give information, not change their minds. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "Sometimes people in this situation. . ." <input type="checkbox"/> "Let's look at the (questionnaire/survey/screening) results together. . ." 3. Focus on one or two key messages that people want to know. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "There are two things to think about right now . . ." 4. Use plain language (short sentences and familiar words) 5. Use pictures and handouts when they are helpful. 6. Emphasize choice and options by avoiding words like "can't," "must," or "have to." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "There are three choices about where to go from here..." <p>Your notes here about TELL:</p>
<p>ASK #2 1) what they thought <i>OR</i> 2) use teach-back to make sure there is understanding</p>	<p>Option 1: What they thought:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "What do you think about that?" <input type="checkbox"/> "I wonder what this all means to you?" <input type="checkbox"/> "I wonder how you think we might best proceed?" <input type="checkbox"/> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>OR</i></p> <p>Option 2: Use teach-back to make sure there is understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "I'd like to make sure I did a good job explaining. Could you say it back to me so I know I was clear?" <input type="checkbox"/> "If someone asked you what we talked about today, what would you tell them?" <input type="checkbox"/> "Can you show me how you are going to (use this equipment/complete this form/....) so I know that I explained it well." <input type="checkbox"/>

Special cases: A rule or a professional or legal obligation:

- A rule: “There are some important things to know about working together, and I want to make sure you understand what they are.”
- A professional obligation: “As your counsellor/nurse/doctor/etc, I’m very concerned about . . . I’d like your thoughts on what I just told you.”
- 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.”
- 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.”

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

Be careful when giving advice, because you can fall into the expert trap! The expert trap is when you give people advice based solely on your ideas and it doesn’t fit for them.

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 want to is . . .”

2. Instead of giving one piece of advice or a single idea, **offer a menu of choices.** 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 for you?”
2. **TELL:** Share two or three ideas all at once. Use the last idea to encourage one of their own. “Some things you could try are _____. _____ or maybe you’ve had an idea while I was talking.”
3. **ASK** if any of these ideas might work.

