

A Resource Guide
for leaders of **PATH**
& Other
Self-management Education

Start where they are



Geriatric Education Center
of Michigan

How to Use This Resource

We have created this guidebook specifically for you, the leaders of PATH, as a resource that you can refer to when working with diverse populations. It is important to remember that the PATH participants will come from a variety of backgrounds and will have different levels of health literacy. Low health literacy is an area of growing concern that prevents many people from receiving adequate health care. This guide addresses health literacy and related issues that you may face as a PATH leader.

Acknowledgements:

This resource guide was created by the following
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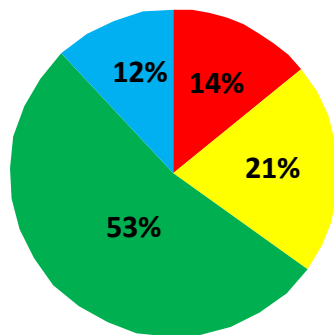
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Defining Health Literacy

ADULTS' HEALTH LITERACY LEVEL 2003



■ Below Basic ■ Basic
■ Intermediate ■ Proficient

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Health literacy measures a person's ability to look for, understand, and use health information.

This can involve reading consent forms, treatment instructions, and prescription bottles.

A health literate person can use this information to make good decisions about his/her health.

Health literacy is not the same as reading literacy. It is not determined by a person's level of education.

To be health literate you need to:

- Be able to decide if information is trustworthy
- Think through risks and benefits
- Calculate dosages
- Understand test results
- Locate health information

DID YOU KNOW?

Only 12% of adults have proficient health literacy.

US Department of Health and Human Services

Factors that Contribute to Health Literacy

In order for a person to navigate the health care system successfully, there are several core abilities that he or she must have.

Knowledge of where to access health information

finding resources within the healthcare system and community like PATH.

Verbal communication

expressing needs and wants to health providers.

Proactivity

taking steps to improve one's own health, such as learning about healthy lifestyle changes.

Literacy skills

reading and understand directions that are presented both verbally and in writing.

Understanding

knowing exactly what health providers are explaining medical information and asking questions if something is not clear.

Application skills to manage health

using what he/she knows or has learned to improve his/her health.

Outside Influences on Health Literacy

Healthcare setting

Where does the person go to for help with health issues? For example, this can include a doctor's office, the health department, an urgent care, or an emergency room.

Life stressors

What else is going on in the person's life? Life stressors can include problems at work, at home, or with friends and family. All of these things can take attention away from a person's health.

Social Support

Does the person have a group of people that he/she can rely on in the event of illness or hardship? Support can come from family, friends, neighbors, and community or religious groups.

Community Resources

What kind of community does the person live in? Are PATH workshops or other workshops offered near him/her?

Socioeconomic Status

Can the person afford to pay for health care services or to commit to a healthy lifestyle? Does he/she have reliable transportation to and from appointments or workshop sessions?

Personal Influences on Health Literacy

Educational Background

What is the reading and writing level of the person? How does this affect his/her ability to understand his/her own health?

Attitudes Towards Health

What is the person's understanding of health? Does he/she feel that health is a priority?

Perceptions of Health Professionals

What is the relationship like between the person and the healthcare provider? Is it based on trust? How comfortable does the person feel? Is he/she able to ask questions when something is not clear?

Emotional/physical state of being

What kind of situation is the person in? Is he/she urgently sick or managing a chronic disease? Is he/she happy or does he/she seem down?

Lay knowledge

What is the general extent to which the person is familiar with how to navigate the healthcare system?

Cultural diversity

Is the person from a different cultural background? If so, what barriers might be present that may limit their ability to navigate the healthcare system and communicate with providers.

Ensuring Successful Communication

Group Awareness

Being aware of your group's characteristics is one of the most important components of being a successful leader. Groups are like small communities made up of unique people. You must be aware of both the group dynamic and the individuals in your class.

Be Conscious of Differences

People in your workshop may be different from you and one another in:



A word cloud on a light green background with a fine dot pattern. The words are arranged in a cluster, with 'gender' being the largest and most prominent. Other words include 'education', 'community', 'age', 'ethnicity', 'sexuality', 'reason for participation', and 'urban'. The words are in various fonts and sizes, some in bold and some in italics.

All of the above will influence how different people will participate in the group and what they will take away from the workshop.

It is important to be sensitive to these and other differences.

Ensuring Successful Communication

It may not always be obvious if all of the group participants are on the same page as both you and one another.

As a leader, you and your co-leader will role-model activities such as action planning. It is important that when doing this, you adjust your role-modeling according to the group. Choose examples that the people in your group can relate to.

For example

Do: “My action plan this week is to walk for 15 minutes after dinner, three times this week.”

Don't: “My action plan this week is to run three miles after dinner, every day this week.”

Avoid phrases like “every day” and encourage your participants to do the same as they are more likely to be successful with their action plan.

Ensuring Successful Communication

Use Plain Language

Plain language is clear and to the point, using only as many words as necessary. It is defined by its ability to be easily read, understood and used. It is not a method of “dumbing down” information. Tips for using plain language (either verbally or written) are:

Limit the number of words in a sentence

For example	
Use “not needed”	Instead of “unnecessary”
Use “stick to”	Instead of “adhere to”

Use words that your group will be comfortable with, and avoid slang that your group may not understand or find offensive. The best way to make sure that the language you are using is appropriate is to ask a member of the community you are working in for their opinion and advice.

Use examples that your group members might be able to relate to.

For example <i>(if you are working with a low literacy group)</i>
Do: “A serving of meat is about the size of a deck of cards.”
Don’t: “A serving of meat is two-to-three ounces.”

Ensuring Successful Communication

Visual Aids

Charts and written activities help you communicate with your participants.

To enhance communication

Write clearly and in large print using a dark color such as blue or black

Avoid cursive

Provide handouts if people are visually impaired

Use bullet points instead of complete sentences to keep ideas short and easy to follow

Consider Visual Impairments

There may be people who have trouble seeing (such as older adults). When working through charts and written brainstorming, remember to read back through the lists slowly, so that those with visual impairments and/or general literacy issues can understand.

Written Activities

For written activities such as brainstorming and problem-solving activities:

Make sure that you write down what the participants want *exactly* as they want it. If you're going to rephrase what they said, make sure to clarify that what you write is correct.

How Can I Help My Group Be Successful?

There will be times when some of the group members will face challenges. It is important to identify those who may be working with general and/or health literacy concerns.

“Some of the participants had difficulty understanding and rating their confidence level. It was hard for them to grasp how to measure their confidence and assign a number to it. In some cases they did not know what confidence meant.”

- PATH Leader

Indicators that someone might be struggling include

Not asking questions

Lack of participation during activities

Answering questions inappropriately

Going on tangents

Participating in side conversations

Seeming uninterested

Approach Them Individually

If a participant shows some of these signs, you can approach him/her individually to see if he/she would like any extra help.

Do Not Force Help Upon Them

If they do not seem interested, do not force help upon them; it is a self-management class after all.

Resources

CapitalAreaHealthAlliance.org

The Chronic Disease Self Management Workshop Leader's Manual, 2012

MiHealthyPrograms.org

The Plain Language Thesaurus for Health Communications, CDC, February 2009

References

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Reminder: Be aware of your group!



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