

DEVELOPING INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS: UNDERSTANDING HEALTH LITERACY

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

This guide and the following lesson plan are designed to provide you with sample tools and preparation that you might consider using to deliver simple, introductory lessons to community members on the topic of health literacy. IMLS has created these materials with the understanding that many organizations do not have the expertise or staff to deliver comprehensive trainings on information literacy topics. If you would rather seek the services of a subject matter expert, we have provided a sample guide for partnering locally with a trainer or offering online training resources to your **community**.

Thank you for all you do to promote information literacy every day.

Advance Preparation:

- While you prepare for this lesson on health literacy, consider compiling a variety of examples to effectively convey the importance of the subject and engage participants.
- Examples can include health-related articles, illustrations/infographics/other visual aids (make sure all sources are attributed), interactive websites, etc., that can help simplify complex health information and make it more accessible.
- These resources can help you demonstrate to participants the practical implications of health literacy in their daily lives, empower them to make informed decisions about their health, and inspire them to become advocates for improving health literacy in their community.

Setting Expectations:

The following section outlines some best practices that we have identified and encourage you to consider. You are welcome to revise as necessary to accurately reflect your training goals.

- Begin by welcoming participants to the training. Introduce yourself as the instructor and thank them for joining you today.
- Inform participants of your role and experience with health literacy. Disclose to the participants that you are not here as a health care provider, nor do you work in the health care industry.
- Clearly communicate any expectations or guidelines for participation and behavior (e.g., avoid interruptions, put phones away). This helps set boundaries and creates a positive learning environment.
- Addressing confidentiality and privacy at the outset of the activity can encourage more active participation. For this lesson plan, we advise that participants' names and/or identities are not attributed to their commentary. Any reporting after the activity, whether internally or to the public, should be in the aggregate. Remind participants that they should not share any personal or confidential information.

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- Give a brief outline of the format and agenda for the training. Let participants know how the training will be structured, including activities or exercises to come.
- Invite each participant to introduce themselves with their first name, if they are willing, in order to facilitate the conversation not for attribution, and any relevant background information such as why they joined the training today. This helps create a sense of community and familiarity among participants.
- Emphasize the importance of everyone's participation and encourage all participants to share their thoughts and experiences openly. Assure them that all perspectives are welcome and valuable.
- Invite participants to ask any questions before the lesson starts.

LESSON PLAN

Objectives:

- By the end of the lesson, participants will be able to grasp how strong health literacy improves individual/community wellbeing and know how to complete several key tasks related to health literacy, including:
 - Identifying resources and evaluating them for accuracy and reliability using a checklist;
 - Understanding how to translate complex health terms; and
 - Communicating confidently with health care providers about their own health.

Materials Needed:

- Pen and paper

Duration:

- This health literacy overview is designed to be delivered in 120 minutes, but it also can be broken into a series of trainings on the topic.

Lesson:

Introduction (10 minutes):

Greet participants and introduce the topic. Provide an overview of what will be covered during the lesson and why understanding health literacy is important to individual/community wellbeing.

- To care for our physical and mental well-being, we need information about our health.
- Health literacy is the ability to find, understand, and use health information.
- Health literacy empowers people to make informed choices about their health.
- Health information is often full of unfamiliar medical terms, scientific concepts, and other complex information. Uncertainty and risk can make it hard to know what to do when a health problem happens.
- When people are feeling overwhelmed — like when they're sick or stressed about a new diagnosis — it's even harder for them to process new information.
- This lesson will cover:
 - How to spot possible mis- and disinformation about public health topics;

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- How to break down science and health information to be less complex; and
- How to analyze and discuss health information with your provider.

Engagement (10 minutes):

Discuss participants' prior knowledge related to health literacy and their experiences with the concepts being taught today.

- Ask the participants:
 - Where do they get health information?
 - Do they ask their family and friends?
 - Do they ask their doctors or other health care providers? Do they search the internet?
- Have them talk in pairs at first and then elicit several responses from the whole group.
- **Note:** Take care to promote an atmosphere of acceptance and respect, as these are culturally bound questions. Before beginning it may be beneficial to remind the participants once more not to disclose any personal or confidential information.

Instruction (40 minutes):

Present information on identifying trustworthy information sources; breaking down complex ideas into smaller, more digestible parts; and analyzing and discussing health information:

- **How to know when a health source is trustworthy:** There is a wealth of information about health, particularly on the internet. Not all of it is correct, and some is designed to mislead you. It's important to always double-check before believing something you hear or see about health. Don't shy away from questioning things and doing some digging to find out the truth. Let's go through a checklist:
 - **Check the source:** Look at where the information is coming from. Is it from a trusted source like a government health agency, a well-known medical organization, or a reliable news outlet? Are they experts in health, like doctors or scientists? Or are they trying to sell something or push a certain belief or product? Experts know what they're talking about; others might just want attention or money.
 - **Look for evidence:** See if the information has facts and evidence to support it. Real public health information usually has examples, visual aids, studies, research, or experts backing it up. Be skeptical of claims that seem too good to be true.
 - **Check for consistency:** Compare what you're hearing with what other trusted sources are saying. If most places are saying the same thing, it's more likely to be true. But if it's only one place saying something different, it might be wrong or misleading. Be careful with information and advice that goes against the prevailing wisdom on a particular health topic.
- **How to break down science and health information to be less complex:** Trying to understand science and health information can be overwhelming. Let's discuss some tricks to simplify the process:
 - **Deconstruct the language:** Science and health information often come with a ton of jargon. Break it down. Look for the main points, like symptoms, or treatment options. If you meet a term you don't understand, find a definition from a trusted source. The more you understand the language, the easier it gets.

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- **Question everything:** Science is all about questioning and seeking the truth. Stay curious and don't be afraid to explore new ideas, ask tough questions, and keep learning.
- **Consider the context:** How does this information fit into the bigger picture of the health topic? Understanding the context helps you see the bigger impact and importance of what you're reading.
- **How to analyze health information:** Developing the skills and confidence to analyze health information can help you make informed decisions about your health and wellbeing. Let's discuss ways you can do that:
 - **Currency and relevance:** Staying up to date with current information in the rapidly evolving field of health is important. Is the information you're reading based on the latest scientific evidence and research findings? Or was it published a long time ago?
 - **Real-life application:** Evaluating all health advice, treatments, and products before making decisions that affect your health is key. Becoming an empowered and informed decision-maker about your health, instead of relying on peer recommendations or marketing tactics, lets you take an active role in managing your own health and wellbeing.
 - **Seeking professional help:** When in doubt or faced with complex health information, seek guidance from health care professionals or experts in the field. If you have a question about advice you've seen on a particular health care topic, share it with your health care provider. Get a second opinion from another provider if you're not totally comfortable with something that has been offered to you regarding your health. Explain back what you're hearing from your provider to ensure you're on the same page.

Guided Practice (15 minutes):

Facilitate exercises where participants can practice applying new knowledge to real-life scenarios and may be faced with roadblocks.

- Set the scene by having participants imagine going to their next doctor's appointment and practice applying the skills they learned today to improve their health literacy in real life.
- Ask them some ideas of things they could do to be prepared for the appointment.
 - Write down a list of questions and concerns.
 - Consider bringing a close friend or family member with you.
- Ask them some ideas of things they could do during the appointment to improve their health outcomes when faced with the roadblocks below.
 - **Roadblock:** They are overwhelmed while receiving a lot of complex information at once and forget what their doctor said.
 - **Solution:** Take notes about what the doctor or health care provider says or ask a friend or family member to take notes for you.
 - **Roadblock:** They aren't sure of all the details about their past appointments and find it difficult to keep track of their health history.
 - **Solution:** Learn how to access your medical records so you can keep track of test results, diagnoses, treatments plans, and medications and prepare for your next appointment.
 - **Roadblock:** They worry about having follow-up questions that they forgot to ask at the appointment.

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- **Solution:** Ask for the doctor's or health care provider's contact information and their preferred method of communication.
- Provide guidance and support as needed, while making sure that participants know that you are not providing specific health advice.

Independent Practice (20 minutes):

Worksheet activity: Ask participants to correctly identify truthful vs. false health information found online.

Assessment (15 minutes):

Evaluate participants' understanding through formative assessment methods (e.g., questioning, observation, quizzes, etc.).

- Discuss answers to worksheet above.

Wrap Up (10 minutes):

Summarize the key points covered during the lesson.

- Spotting mis- and disinformation about public health topics:
 - **Check the source:** Ensure information comes from trusted sources like government agencies or medical organizations.
 - **Look for evidence:** Seek facts and evidence to support claims and be skeptical of those that lack support.
 - **Check for consistency:** Compare information with other trusted sources to verify its accuracy.
- Breaking down science and health information:
 - **Deconstruct the language:** Break down jargon to understand complex terms.
 - **Question everything:** Stay curious and explore new ideas by asking questions.
 - **Consider the context:** Understand how information fits into the bigger picture to grasp its importance.
- Analyzing health information:
 - **Currency and relevance:** Stay updated with current information based on the latest scientific evidence.
 - **Real-life application:** Evaluate health advice, treatments, and products before making decisions for your health.
 - **Seeking professional help:** Don't hesitate to seek guidance from health care professionals or get a second opinion when needed.
- Ask participants to share one new thing they learned about health literacy today.
- Summarize the importance of health literacy for individual and community wellbeing.
 - Health literacy is important for both people and communities. It helps individuals understand health information so they can make smart choices about their health.
 - This includes knowing how to prevent illnesses, manage long-term health problems, and communicate effectively with health care providers.
 - When people have good health literacy, it also can help reduce health differences between different groups of people and even save money on health care.

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- Health literacy is key to making people and communities healthier and stronger.
- Encourage participants to continue their progress with health literacy.
 - Offer them health information websites that are generally considered accurate and trustworthy to check in the future, for example:
 - **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** www.cdc.gov: Provides health information on many topics, including diseases and conditions, healthy living, environmental health, and workplace health.
 - **HealthFinder** www.healthfinder.gov: Includes health information on a range of health topics, online tools and quizzes, and advice on where to find health services and health insurance.
 - **MedlinePlus** www.medlineplus.gov: Offers easy-to-read health information in English and other languages (full site is available in Spanish).

Instructor Reflection:

- Reflect on the effectiveness of the lesson.
- Consider what worked well and areas for improvement.
- Adjust future lessons based on reflections.