



## Health Literacy

**Health literacy** refers to an individual's ability to obtain, understand and use healthcare information to make informed decisions, to stay healthy and to follow the specific steps in a treatment plan. An individual's health literacy depends on many factors including their facility with reading, writing and understanding the English language; cultural background; understanding of basic scientific and health care research concepts; knowledge and use of community resources; and ability to access and use the Internet to obtain health information.

Health care professionals can support individuals and families in building health literacy by the following:

1. Encourage “speaking up” and shared decision making during all encounters.
2. Avoid the use of medical jargon and acronyms.
3. Use an in-person or telephone interpreter to communicate with the family in their own language.
4. Discuss possible cultural factors that may influence health care decisions. Use tools such as:
  - a. Brief Interview to Elicit Health Care Beliefs
  - b. Brief Assessment of the Family's Cultural and Religious Practices
5. Review access, use and understanding of health information from the Internet; direct families to appropriate websites and encourage families to review information they obtain with you.
  - a. [www.trustortrash.org](http://www.trustortrash.org), a resource for patients and families developed by the Access to Credible Genetics (ATCG) Resource Network.
6. Provide treatment recommendations in writing. Modify format and sentence length and use illustrations or pictures as needed.
7. Ask how the individual and family would like to receive information from the office—by phone, mail or email.
8. Use simple techniques to clarify an individual's understanding of health care recommendations.
  - a. Ask "How confident are you ...." (e.g., giving your child medication, knowing why you are giving it and what the side effects are) and “How comfortable are you....” (e.g., asking questions if you don't understand my recommendations).
  - b. AMA medication review “Teach back” technique
  - c. “Ask Me Three” - What is my main problem? What do I need to do? Why is it important for me to do this?
9. Use a tool such as the Checklist for Individual/Caregiver Understanding to work collaboratively with the youth and family to set goals to build health literacy skills and knowledge.