

# HEALTH LITERACY GUIDE

## THERAPIST HANDOUT GUIDE

### What is health literacy?



Health literacy involves the ability to access, understand, and use health-related information to make appropriate decisions.



### Why is health literacy important?

Health literacy is important for one's health and well-being. It impacts our discussions with doctors, following medical recommendations, preventing illnesses, and promoting healthy habits. Health literacy greatly influences our medical and health-related decisions. Therefore, we must provide our clients with health information through verbal consultations and handouts that involve simple, straightforward language to avoid misunderstanding.



### What does research say?

- Over one-third of United States adults have basic or below basic health literacy levels.
- Online educational materials, such as informative webpages, are at a reading level ranging from grade 10 to college.
- The U.S. National Institutes of Health guidelines for providing educational materials should be written at a third- to seventh-grade level.
- When healthcare professionals provide educational content from website sources that have a sixth-grade reading level and include visual aids, it simplifies and clarifies the information.

### How can health literacy impact a client's health?

- Cultural misunderstandings and assumptions between clients and healthcare providers
- Poor participation in health-related discussions
- Lack of follow-through medical interventions and medications
- Delayed medical interventions
- Frequently missed medical appointments
- Anxiety with medical visits
- Difficulty making health-related decisions with limited understood information





## How can you improve health literacy?

- Healthcare professionals are responsible for making our health information accessible and understandable for clients, so they can participate more fully in their health.
- The following are examples of how you can improve health literacy:
  - When providing verbal information, gain the client's attention quickly by:
    - Initially giving the important information
    - Tell what actions to take
    - Explain why the actions are important for them.
  - When providing informational resources, such as handouts and care instructions, you should present the information:
    - Accurately with concise information written within a 3rd to the 7th-grade learning level
    - Use concrete nouns and an active voice
    - Tell the clients what they should do rather than what they should not do
    - Tell the clients how the information will benefit them
    - Define necessary jargon
    - Select words with a single definition or connotation
    - Be consistent with your word use
    - Use analogies that your clients would be familiar with
    - Avoid unnecessary abbreviations
    - Use visuals to help communicate the information with one visual per information
    - Use culturally sensitive visuals
  - Offer and use language assistance to clients who have limited English proficiency



**For more information on how to evaluate an adult's health literacy level, please refer to:**  
**<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/researchevaluate/measure-peoples-skills-experiences.html>**

**For more information on health literacy, you may refer to [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org).**

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