

Talking to your doctor

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To plan what to say to a doctor
- To give information clearly and precisely
- To ask for and check information



RESOURCES

- Copies of Resources 1, 3 and 4
- Cards prepared from Resource 2
- Small blank cards/sticky notes
- Scenario cards to be devised by tutor (Activity 3 ESOL)

- Gap-fill sentences to be devised by tutor (Activity 5 ESOL)
- Audio equipment 44-45

RELATED TOPICS

Answering your doctor's questions (Theme 10, Topic 7)
Telling your doctor what's wrong (Theme 10, Topic 8)

HEALTH SKILLS

Doctors need to fully understand patients' symptoms in order to make an informed diagnosis. In many cases parents or relatives may have to explain the symptoms experienced by a child or close relative. This verbal information or 'history' is obtained in two ways. The first is from answering questions that the doctor asks and the second is from things the patient says about his or her condition.

Having the skills and vocabulary to be able to describe symptoms in detail can be very helpful in the process of getting an accurate diagnosis. Equally as important is that the patient feels confident enough to be able to ask questions and ask for clarification from the doctor. The doctor also needs to be sure that s/he has explained or answered things clearly by checking that the patient knows what to do next.

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

In order to get the most out of visiting the doctor, learners need to be able to:

- be clear about what they need to say
- express their concerns and observations clearly
- listen and respond to questions
- listen and understand information given by the doctor.

Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

Activities in this topic will contribute to learning in the following curriculum areas:

- express facts clearly **English** L1.4 (L_{SLC}/L1.3)
- give information in a logical sequence **English** L1.4 (L_{SLC}/L1.4)
- listen and understand explanations from a doctor **English** L1.7 (L_{SLR}/L1.2)
- ask questions to obtain further information **English** L1.2 (L_{SLC}/L1.2)
- clarify and confirm understanding **English** L1.2 (L_{SLR}/L1.3).

- Ask learners if they have seen a doctor recently. Ask if they felt satisfied that they said all that they wanted to say. Did they find out all the information they needed? How confident do they feel about asking questions in this situation?
- Find out if any learners have experience of NHS Walk-in Centres. Encourage them to talk about what happened, and in what ways it was different to seeing a doctor at a GP practice.
- Discuss the importance of being prepared before going to see the doctor and the usefulness of making a list of problems that need to be discussed before the consultation.
- Talk about other information that the doctor might need to know in order to understand your problem and suggest treatment (e.g. any medicines you are taking, any allergies you have, past medical problems, etc.).
- Emphasise the importance of having this information ready when attending NHS Walk-in Centres or out-of-hours appointments where the doctor may not have access to your medical records.
- As a group, discuss the barriers that they or others may experience when talking to a doctor or other health professional. These barriers may include:
 - (for some cultures) feeling uncomfortable being examined by health professionals of the opposite sex
 - having language to express symptoms
 - feeling ill
 - time pressures
 - feeling overwhelmed by the environment
 - lacking confidence in a medical setting
 - feeling embarrassed or not wanting to make a fuss or sound negative.
- Display learners' suggestions. Discuss as a group and share ideas about how to overcome them (e.g. if they feel uncomfortable about being examined by someone of the opposite sex they could ask to be seen by someone of the same sex).
- Suggest that being aware of these barriers is an important step towards overcoming them, and that you will be exploring some of the issues in the session.

How easy is it to explain your own (or someone else's) symptoms to the doctor or nurse?

What can you do to prepare for a visit to the doctor?

Why is it important for the doctor to know about any medicines you're taking?

ACTIVITY 1

Decide what information to give to the doctor

- Hand out Resource 1. Ask learners to look at the picture at the top and to read the scenario about Malini. Ask them why they think she should be taken to see the doctor, and what they would expect the doctor to do (e.g. examine Malini; ask questions; offer advice; prescribe some medicine).
- Go through the information again a sentence at a time. Using the cards on Resource 2, ask learners to sort the sentences and take out any they feel are not relevant or important for the doctor to know.
- Discuss the information the group have identified and ask why they think it is useful to the doctor. Ask if they think any important information is missing.
- Hand out some blank cards or sticky notes. Ask learners to add any additional information they think may be useful.

What information will help the doctor understand what's wrong?

Support

Take each sentence separately and discuss its value to the doctor. Ask direct questions (e.g. 'Why might the doctor need to know how old Malini is?').

ESOL

Check learners understand everyday words and expressions (e.g. 'she has a high temperature'; 'the pain seems to come and go'; 'she's usually a lively child').

ACTIVITY 2

Give information in an order that makes it clear

- Ask learners how they can make the information clearer. It may be by emphasising the important facts first, or by sorting the information into time order. Sorting information into time order is like telling a story. It may be easier to remember than trying to prioritise the facts.
- Use the cards from Resource 2 to sort the key information into time order. Suggest learners start by answering the following questions: 'What was the first sign that Malini was ill?' 'When did it start?'
- Put the other details in time order and then read the sentences in order.

How can you make information clear?

Support

Encourage learners to underline time order words as clues: 'yesterday', 'last night', 'all week'.

ESOL

Support learners in using verb tenses correctly: present tense for explaining symptoms (e.g. 'She has a temperature', 'The pain seems to come and go'; past tenses for giving the history (e.g. 'It started yesterday'; 'Last night she didn't sleep').

ACTIVITY 3

Provide the doctor with further details

- Discuss what other information the doctor might want to know (this is about predicting the doctor's questions in order to provide accurate and clear information). For example, whether other children have been ill at playgroup, what Malini ate last, whether she has had anything to drink, whether she has had anything similar before, exactly where the pain is, etc.
- Where possible, relate this to learners' own experience of going to the doctor.

Do you prepare what you will say to your doctor?

Support

Where learners are unable to think of additional information, offer suggestions and ask them to sort these into two categories: helpful information and not so helpful. Relate this to learners' own experiences where appropriate.

ESOL

Give learners an opportunity to practise describing a medical concern in pairs. They should describe the symptoms and history, and answer questions. You may want to prepare some scenario cards as the basis for the activity.

ACTIVITY 4 44

Ask questions to clarify

- Ask learners to look at the picture and thought-bubbles at the bottom of Resource 1. Discuss the importance of asking questions to discuss any concerns you may have.
- Read through the bulleted list of things you might want to ask about (on the left at the bottom of Resource 1). Discuss what questions you could ask and how to word them.
- Play the audio clip of the doctor talking to Malini's mother. Encourage learners to suggest questions they would want to ask in this situation, and to write these in the speech-bubbles on Resource 3.
- Support learners with suggestions for questions if they are struggling. Help them word the questions using the phrases in the box at the bottom of Resource 3.
- Listen to the audio clip again. Pause at the numbered points (see audio script) and encourage learners to ask relevant questions.
- Hand out Resource 4. Ask learners to compare these questions with the questions they decided to ask. You may want to put the questions onto small cards. Learners can then sort them into questions they would/wouldn't want to ask, and put them in order of priority. They can include their own questions.

Support

Reassure learners that the questions they choose to ask are personal to them, and can relate to anything that they don't follow or need more information about. Ask questions to help them focus (e.g. 'Do you know what antibiotics do?').

ESOL

Read the audio script one sentence at a time and ask learners questions about what they heard or didn't understand. Use these to help guide their own questions.

Why is it important to ask your doctor questions?

What questions would you ask?

TIP

Write up question words on the board (e.g. **what, when, where, how, why**) to help prompt learners' questions.

ACTIVITY 5 44-45

Check information to make sure you have understood

- Draw learners' attention to the thought-bubble at the bottom of Resource 1: 'I think he said to take the medicine three times a day.'
- Explain that asking questions to check information is a way of making sure you have understood what the doctor has said. Ask learners to think about their own experiences.
- Discuss different ways of checking information. For example:
 - asking another question
 - repeating back what was said
 - asking the speaker to repeat what was said
 - asking the speaker to explain again in different words or in more detail.
- Model these different approaches for the learners and refer them to the box of bulleted points on the right at the bottom of Resource 1.
- Play the audio clip for Activity 4 again (track 44, pausing at the numbered points). Ask learners to suggest any additional questions or statements they could use to confirm their understanding.

Why is it a good idea to check the doctor's instructions about medicines?

How can you check what the doctor says?

- Play the model audio clip (including responses) for comparison (track 45). Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers here. It is about checking and confirming what **you** need to know.

Support

Reassure learners that all questions are valid and it is a matter of what they personally did not hear properly or want to double-check. Checking may mean:

- asking more questions
- repeating back information
- asking for people to repeat information or explain further.

ESOL

- Reinforce learners' understanding of the questions on Resource 4 by using gap-fill activities (e.g. '..... any side-effects?'). Learners can work in pairs to discuss the missing words.
- Give learners cards with some more examples of expressions for checking and confirming. Ask them to match these to the different ways for checking listed above (e.g. repeating back what was said, asking the speaker to explain again but in different words/more detail).

Action

- Give learners a new scenario for a consultation with the doctor, or ask them to think of one for themselves. Go through the preparation process as covered in the activities.
- Suggest learners role-play the initial part of the consultation, to include the patient giving an explanation of the problem and the doctor asking questions for more information.

TIP

If appropriate help learners compose questions for themselves, but respect their right to confidentiality.

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RESOURCE 1

44-45

To get the most out of your doctor's appointment you need to be prepared and know what you want to tell the doctor. If anything your doctor says is not clear, or if s/he gives you too much information in one go, it's fine to ask questions or ask the doctor to slow down and/or repeat what they have said until you are sure you understand.

Why do I need to take her to the doctor?
What am I expecting the doctor to do?

What information should I give the doctor?

What else might he want to know?



Malini is three. Last night she didn't sleep and kept pulling her ear. She didn't eat anything at lunch or tea yesterday. It started yesterday morning at playgroup. The pain seems to come and go. She has a high temperature too. She's usually a lively child, but she's been very quiet all week and really miserable. She cried all night last night – we had to keep her in bed with us.

Why is he checking her ears?

'Infection' sounds bad.
Will she be OK to go to playgroup tomorrow?

I think he said to take the medicine three times a day.



You might want to ask about:

- the examination
- any medicine the doctor prescribes
- how long it should take to get better.

To check information you can:

- ask for information to be repeated
- explain you have not understood
- repeat what you think the doctor said to check your understanding.

Malini is three.

Last night she didn't sleep and kept pulling her ear.

She didn't eat anything at lunch or tea yesterday.

It started yesterday morning at playgroup.

The pain seems to come and go.

She has a high temperature too.

She's usually a lively child, but she's been very quiet all week and really miserable.

She cried all night last night – we had to keep her in bed with us.

What questions would you ask the doctor?

Phrases you can use

What is ...?

Can you tell me more about ...?

Could you explain ...?

How long ...?

What do you think ...?

Is it OK to ...?

Does it matter if ...?

Will it affect her hearing or anything else?

What do you think caused the infection?

She has a baby brother. Is it catching?

Can I give her anything for the pain?

Is it OK for her to go out?

When will she start to feel better?

What sort of antibiotics are they?

Are there any side-effects?

Is it a liquid medicine or tablets?

She isn't eating at the moment. Does it matter if she takes the medicine without food?

ACTIVITY 2 / Resource 2

Possible order:

She's usually a lively child, but she's been very quiet all week and really miserable.

It started yesterday morning at playgroup.

She didn't eat anything at lunch or tea yesterday.

Last night she didn't sleep and kept pulling her ear.

The pain seems to come and go.

She has a high temperature too.

ACTIVITIES 4 AND 5



Doctor: It looks like Malini has an ear infection. It can affect children in different ways, and it can be very painful.① She's probably feeling sick because of the pain and won't want to eat, but try to make sure she has plenty to drink.② I'm going to try her on some mild antibiotics. She'll need to take the medicine three times a day with food if possible. Make sure she finishes the course, too.③ Keep her warm and quiet.④ Bring her back in three days' time if she's no better.⑤

ACTIVITY 5



Doctor: It looks like Malini has an ear infection. It can affect children in different ways, and it can be very painful.

Mother: So you're saying that she's probably in a lot of pain. That explains why she's been so miserable and not sleeping.

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ANSWERS AND AUDIO SCRIPTS

Doctor: She's probably feeling sick because of the pain and won't want to eat, but try to make sure she has plenty to drink.

Mother: So I'll make sure she's getting plenty to drink, and I won't worry too much if she doesn't want to eat.

Doctor: I'm going to try her on some mild antibiotics. She'll need to take the medicine three times a day with food if possible. Make sure she finishes the course, too.

Mother: Can I just check? Three times a day. Finish the course ...

Doctor: Keep her warm and quiet.

Mother: If she needs to be quiet, I won't take her to playgroup then.

Doctor: Keep an eye on her and if she's getting worse come and see me, or bring her back in three days' time if she's no better.

Mother: OK. Can you just repeat the part about eating and taking the medicine? I'm not sure I understood.