

COMMUNICATION FOR IMMUNIZATION

E-LEARNING RESOURCES

21 | TIPS FOR INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION (IPC) TRAINING

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What is interpersonal communication? Interpersonal communication (IPC) is two-way communication, where speakers can exchange information and ideas, listen to one another, ask questions, and provide help and support. For improved immunization coverage outcomes, IPC must happen at every contact between a health worker and caretaker.

In IPC, health workers build a rapport with caretakers and communities by:

- being respectful of culture and social customs
- providing key information in the appropriate language and level of literacy
- and spending the time parents need to ask questions and discuss issues of concern.

IPC is also non-verbal, whereby messages are communicated through cues such as:

- appropriate appearance and dress
- socially accepted body movements and postures
- facial expressions, eye contact and physical touch.

To practice IPC, health workers, community health workers, social mobilizers and leaders need:

- IPC skills, acquired through training on the reasons and methods for IPC (see more below)
- knowledge of the culture they will be working with
- knowledge of the key messages about the basic reasons for vaccination, the vaccines the child will receive, the possible side effects, and the date of the return visit
- Job aids and IEC materials such as simple flipcharts, posters or brochures appropriate to the literacy of the communities they are working with

Core IPC skills can be categorized as the GATHER approach: “Greet, Ask, Tell, Help, Explain and Return.”¹

Greet actions:

- When meeting someone in a facility or household, greet everyone according to cultural traditions

- Introduce yourself, what you do, and the purpose of the meeting
- When meeting with caretakers, be sure they can sit in a comfortable place (e.g. in the shade)

Ask actions:

- Allow the caregivers to ask questions
- Ask questions in the household about the child’s health, age, vaccination status
- Use open-ended questions to elicit more information (e.g. about vaccine hesitancy)
- Listen to the caregivers’ verbal and non verbal language
- Keep body language positive and open and keep eye contact as per cultural traditions
- Give time, don’t hurry and stay patient
- Respect all opinions.

Tell actions:

- Tell people what they need to know, reinforce what they know already
- Provide information about any misconceptions
- Don’t pretend to know everything. If you don’t have an answer, return with it.

Help in the decision-making actions:

- Help caretakers to overcome personal fears or beliefs
- Help caretakers to overcome religious or social beliefs
- Explain why children need multiple doses of some vaccines

¹ The IPC section is adapted from the UNICEF guide “*Training Curriculum. Interpersonal Communication Skills; Introduction of Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV)*” [year and link?] and, add “Interpersonal Community Training Manual for Change Agents and Polio Mobilisers” – November 2013, Valerie Stetson [was this finalised?]

Explain actions:

- Where possible use IEC materials and job aids for higher retention
- Keep language simple using local idioms
- Use local examples, language and personal stories
- Explain what vaccines the child will receive, any side effects, and when the child should return
- Explain the importance of the vaccination card and bringing it to the next visit.

Repeat actions:

- Repeat visits and discussions wins trust and engagement
- Repeat the same respectful, open behaviour every time you see the caretakers.

IPC Training

Like IPC itself, IPC training should be participatory – an exchange of information, ideas, questions, answers, examples and listening. It should use adult learning principles and methods, including learning-by-doing activities, large and small group discussions, brainstorming, role-play and practice in the classroom.

The training should aim to build the confidence of the trainees, so that they have a good grasp on both the technical information required to discuss vaccine issues with caretakers, and the IPC skills to engage caretakers in the most productive way possible.

IPC training should include:

- A participatory curriculum respecting adult learning methods
- Information tailored to the local situation (with a focus on the main communication-related issues that are barriers to high coverage)
- A qualified trainer familiar with adult learning methods
- A comfortable, shaded venue
- Professional organization and materials – registration, flip boards, paper, pens, handouts
- A pre and post test, to measure short-term retention of the materials
- The IEC materials trainees are expected to work with in the field.

For more information and resources visit -

<https://intranet.unicef.org/PD/Health.nsf/Site%20Pages/Page01030808>

If your office wishes to conduct IPC training, contact the UNICEF immunization unit for a model curriculum, guidance and materials.

