

Consultation skills for pharmacy support staff

A CPPE learning resource



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CONSULT/SS/CARD

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Disclaimer

We have developed this learning programme to support your practice in this topic area. We recommend that you use it in combination with other established reference sources. If you are using it significantly after the date of initial publication, then you should refer to current published evidence. CPPE does not accept responsibility for any errors or omissions.

Feedback

We hope you find this learning programme useful for your practice.

Please help us to assess its value and effectiveness by emailing us at: feedback@cppe.ac.uk

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Excellent communication and consultation skills are a key part of providing safe and effective services.

We have developed this set of cards, supported by a range of other learning resources, to help all pharmacy staff improve their communication and consultation skills. Whether you are a dispensing assistant, a medicines counter assistant, or the driver delivering medicines to patients' homes, these learning resources are for you.

Everyone involved in providing pharmacy services must be competent and well informed so that they can safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and the public in all that they do.¹

The website:

www.consultationskillsforpharmacy.com contains an extensive range of learning resources to support pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in developing their skills so that they can meet a set of practice standards for consultation skills.

Work together using these cards and the other learning resources they point you to, so that **everyone in the pharmacy team** has the chance to develop their communication and consultation skills. The learning resources will provide you with **flexible learning**, including activities and tools that you can practise in your pharmacy setting to help you become **the best you can be** when speaking with the people who come into your pharmacy. Perhaps your pharmacist could use these cards as the basis for a weekly training session.

Use your consultation skills every time you speak with someone on a medicines-related matter - whether it is three minutes or 23 minutes!

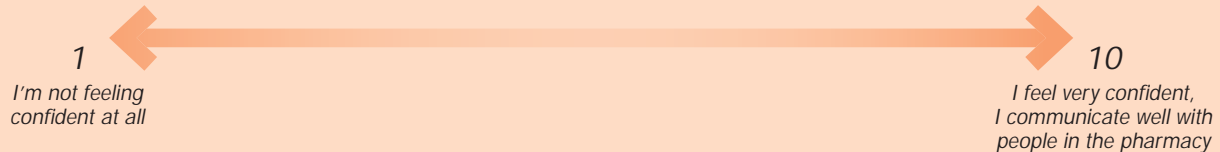
Turn over
to find out
more.

¹ General Pharmaceutical Council. www.pharmacyregulation.org/standards/standards-registered-pharmacies

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Where are you now?

Before you start working through the activities on these cards, how confident do you feel about your communication and consultation skills – where do you sit on the arrow?



2. What would you like to learn?

When you have worked through all these cards and the other learning resources they point you to, you should be able to:

- describe what **patient-centred** care means
- be more confident when **communicating** with the people who come into your pharmacy
- recognise **good communication and consultation skills**, compared with those that need improvement
- explain how **facial expressions and body language** can improve communication and help to build rapport
- apply **good listening skills**
- know how to **close a consultation effectively and safely**
- discuss some of the **challenges and barriers** to good communication that you come across in your pharmacy.

2 First impressions

Top tips

First impressions count. How you look and greet a person will create an immediate impression of you and the pharmacy in the person's mind. It's important that everyone coming into the pharmacy sees a positive, professional image of the whole pharmacy team and the services they provide.

Do you always stop what you are doing and greet the person immediately, with a friendly smile and a: *"Hello, my name is... how may I help you?"*.

"Knowing someone is interested in you from the start and wants to help meet your needs and concerns feels so much better."

- Be **attentive** and focus on the person.
- **Greet the person** professionally, using their name (if known) and introduce yourself if you haven't met the person before, for example, *"Hello, my name is John, I am the delivery driver from Acme Pharmacy"*.
- Think about the consultation as being a **shared discussion with shared decisions** - this is called establishing a shared agenda. Do this by asking the person what they would like to discuss right at the start, *"What can I help you with today?"*.

Try out the activities overleaf.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. **Hello, my name is...** Kate Granger, a doctor who has recently been a patient herself, started the *Hello my name is...* campaign, because she noticed that not all of the healthcare professionals looking after her introduced themselves. Kate says that getting to know each other's names is the first step to providing compassionate care. Getting the simple things right, means the more complex things will follow more easily and naturally. Watch the video, *Hello my name is....Interview with Kate Granger*:
<http://hellomynameis.org.uk/home>



2. **Watch, compare and think about your own practice**



Video 1 *First impressions count*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148851233/3d34309882>

Video 2 *Hello, my name is...*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068166/cd1fd0bbd0>



	Which was better?	
Did the assistants make a good first impression ?	Video 1	Video 2
Did the assistants stop what they were doing as soon as the customer approached the counter?	Video 1	Video 2
Did the assistants smile and greet the customer?	Video 1	Video 2
If you had been the customer, which consultation would you have preferred?	Video 1	Video 2

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com (Hotspots 1 and 2) for more learning on this subject.

See Card 4
to learn more
about speaking
and listening
skills.

Remember

...a good friendly start to a consultation is essential.

Top tips

Patient-centred care means putting the patient at the **centre** of all decisions about their healthcare. We have moved away from the healthcare professional making the decisions or telling the patient what to do. **Patient-centred care** is about the patient and the healthcare professional **working together** - with less telling and more listening - to make a **shared decision** about the patient's care.

Do all your customers think this?

"Whenever I need a consultation the pharmacy team listen to me, always address my concerns and give me different options to choose from."

"There's no doubt that involving patients in their care improves adherence to medicines and the patient's quality of life."

- **Involve** the patient at every stage of the consultation – even when you are busy.
- Find out **what the patient already knows** and understands about the problem.
- Find out their **beliefs and concerns** about their health, illness and treatments – you may not agree, but you should acknowledge them to build a relationship.
- Remember that pharmacy professionals are experts in medicines and health matters, but **the patient is an expert in their own health**.
- Establish the **patient's expectations** – do they have a medicine in mind?
- Make suggestions and **give options**, rather than telling the patient what to do.

Try out the activities overleaf.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Watch this CPPE *Consultation skills for pharmacy* animation

...to learn more about patient-centred care.

<https://vimeo.com/141168473>



2. Watch, compare and think about your own practice



Video 3 *Patient-centred, the choice is yours*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068167/1017f7e361>

Video 4 *Avoid the telling zone*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068165/1e4d68fe59>



	Which was better?	
Did the assistant take a patient-centred approach?	Video 3	Video 4
Did the assistant give the person choices ?	Video 3	Video 4
Did the assistant ensure shared decision making ?	Video 3	Video 4
Did the assistant offer further advice ?	Video 3	Video 4

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com
(Hotspots 4 and 5) for more learning on this subject.

Remember...at the heart of patient-centred care is

- ...listening not telling.
- ...giving the patient any available options.
- ...ensuring shared decision making.

On Card 4
you will find
out more about
speaking and
listening skills.

Good communication skills in face-to-face or telephone conversations are essential if you and the person you are speaking with are going to get the most benefit from the consultation. We speak with our mouths – but also our facial expressions. **The words we use and the way the words are said** all help to make sure we give the right message. We need to ask questions to understand, but **listening actively** is just as important.

Do you jump in to offer information so you can serve a person quickly? Each person has a story to tell and if we interrupt too quickly to offer information, we might get the story wrong or make the person feel patronised or disgruntled.

“We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we speak!”

Top tips

Speaking

- Use the **right tone of voice** to reflect the conversation – kind and caring for serious conversations and perhaps more humorous for lighter conversations.
- Think about the **words** you are using.
- **Avoid** medical or pharmacy **jargon**.
- Speak **clearly**.
- Use **open questions** to gather information.
- **Pause** and let the person speak.

Listening

- Listen actively with your **ears** and listen out for clues, such as tone of voice.
- Listen actively with your **eyes** – look out for non-verbal clues, such as facial expressions and body language.
- **Reflect back** the key points to the person so they know you have listened and understood.

Try out the activities overleaf.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Keeping it simple for safety

Here are a few medical or pharmacy terms that we use every day. Think of some simple words or phrases you would use to explain these:

*Analgesic Anti-inflammatory Conjunctivitis Anticoagulant NHS 111
A&E Pre-payment certificate Repeat prescription MUR NMS EHC
P Medicine Take on an empty stomach*

2. Watch this video about listening and summarising

Video 5 *Shared decision making, listening*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068168/9a25ef8d36>



Watch the video and notice how...

- ...the assistant starts by **summarising** what the person has already told her
- ...the assistant **pauses** to allow him to confirm what she has summarised
- ...she asks if he has tried anything already, watch how she **doesn't criticise** him for using someone else's medicine but provides advice
- ...she **gets agreement** for the advice she has given
- ...she addresses **his concerns** about it being serious
- ...she confirms what **they have agreed**.

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com (Hotspots 3 and 7) for more learning on this subject.

On Card 5 you will find out more about open questions and Card 6 will look at body language in more detail.

Remember

- ...speak clearly, avoid jargon and use the right tone of voice.
- ...listen actively - it's just as important as speaking.
- ...don't be judgemental.

You may use the WWHAM questions to help you gather information.

Who is the medicine for?

What are the symptoms?

How long has the person had the symptoms?

Have you tried **anything** already?

Are you taking any other **medicines**?

Most of the questions in WWHAM are open questions, which means they need more than just a 'Yes' or 'No' response. These are important to help you gather the information you need to supply a medicine safely, but sometimes these questions might be too structured and give you little chance to explore the person's ideas and concerns.

Closed questions can be answered 'Yes' or 'No', for example, *"Have you taken this medicine before?"*.

The top tips explain some other types of questions you can ask.

Top tips

TED - using very open questions, which start with **Tell**, **Explain** or **Describe** and invite the person to tell you their story, will help you gather more information in a shorter time.

ICE – Exploring a person's **Ideas**, **Concerns** and **Expectations** helps establish their view of the problem and is a more patient-centred approach.

Here are some examples of how you could use TED and ICE with WWHAM:

Tell me **why** you have come to the pharmacy today

Explain the problem to me ...and **who** is it for?

Describe your symptoms to me...and **how** long have you had these?

Ideas: Do you have any **ideas** about what might have caused it?

Concerns: Is there anything in particular that is worrying you?

Expectations: Have you had any thoughts on what might be the best approach? Have you tried **anything** already?

What other **medicines** do you take?

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Find out more

To find out more about different questioning techniques, download the CPPE distance learning programme, *Consultation skills for pharmacy practice* and read about questioning techniques in *Section 4, Effective consultation skills*.

www.consultationskillsforpharmacy.com/docs/docb.pdf



2. Questioning techniques in action



Watch Video 6 *Shared decision making, questioning*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068170/7f519c964e>

- The first time you watch the video, count how many **open and closed** questions the assistant uses.
- Watch the video again and think about the **technique used to gather information** - think about the WWHAM, ICE and TED techniques you read about overleaf.
- Think especially about whether the assistant uses a **patient-centred approach**.
- Write down some **questions** you would find easy to use, making sure you are taking a patient-centred approach.

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com (Hotspot 6) for more learning on this subject.

Remember

...asking the right questions helps you to gather as much information as possible so that the person gets the best from the consultation.

Sometimes you have to overcome barriers in a consultation – look at Card 10 for more details.

Top tips

The words we speak will get lost if our **body language** doesn't tell the same story. The way we stand or sit, our **facial expressions** and **our eyes** can all speak a thousand words. Below are some signs to look out for when interpreting body language. Make sure that you use the ones in the *Open list*!

	Open	Closed
Facial expression	Smile and display empathy and interest	Frowning when asking questions can look judgemental
Eyes	Have direct eye contact and wide eyes to show truthfulness and interest, but do not stare	Looking down and away when a person is talking can look as though you are not interested
Hands and arms	Keep hands and arms uncrossed and be animated, but not too lively	Crossed arms looks defensive and can create a barrier
Legs	If sitting, keep your legs uncrossed	Crossed legs can indicate a closed attitude
Body position	Hips and shoulders should face the person; if you are sitting, lean slightly forward	Avoid turning away but don't lean too close to the person
Head	Occasional nodding reassures the person that you are listening; tilting the head shows interest	Shaking the head from side to side can indicate disagreement

Body language can betray you, especially facial expression. Using relaxed and open body language will help put the person at ease and helps to build a good relationship.

"When someone stands there with their arms folded or shaking their head, it really does put you off sharing any more information about the help you need."

Try out the activities overleaf.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Watch Video 1 *First impressions count*

Focus on the body language of the two assistants.

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148851233/3d34309882>



- Watch the way the assistants stand.
- Watch how the assistants' body language makes them look **disinterested**.
- What could they have done better?

2. Think about your own body language

Ask a colleague to record you (perhaps using a phone or tablet device) when you are speaking to another colleague. This doesn't have to be a pharmacy conversation. Make sure you have permission from your friend or colleague to film them too. Watch the recording but turn off the sound and make a note of your body language. Watch also to see how you reflect the body language of the other person, for example, did you smile when they smiled? Reflecting the open body language of the person you are speaking with shows them that you are listening.

Did you:

- **smile** and show interest?
- look the person directly in the **eyes**, without staring?
- keep your hands and arms (and legs) **unfolded**?
- **face** the person with your shoulders and hips?
- **nod** reassuringly when listening?

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com (Hotspots 1 and 8) for more learning on this subject.

Remember

...the words we speak will get lost if our body language doesn't tell the same story.

Body language is just one way to help you to build a relationship with someone. Look at Card 7 to find out more.

Top tips

If you can build a relationship with someone from the start of a consultation right through to the end, it is more likely they will trust you and any advice or information you have given them.

"At my pharmacy, they do a good job. I feel like they care about me."

"I think she was a new member of staff. I hadn't seen her before in the pharmacy but she did take the time to get to know me."

Try out the activities overleaf.

- Use appropriate **body language**.
- Demonstrate **empathy** – try and put yourself in the person's shoes to empathise with their situation and feelings. Express concern, for example: *"I can imagine it must be exhausting for you with your child coughing all night"*.
- **Avoid sympathy** – don't say *"I know how you feel"* because the person might say or think *"How do you know how I feel?"*.
- **Don't judge** – you may disagree with a person's lifestyle, but your own views and opinions are not relevant.
- **Involve the person** – suggest options and give the reasons for them, but let the person decide. You might say, for example, *"I could sell you this cough medicine which may soothe the cough, but you could also try drinking some hot water with a bit of lemon juice and honey and propping your pillows up at night, what would you prefer?"*.
- **Listen actively** and try to spot the signs from the person's body language to identify whether they have concerns that they are not telling you about.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Watch Video 2 *Hello, my name is...*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068166/cd1fd0bbd0>



How does the assistant show empathy to the mother who has been kept awake by her coughing child?

2. Watch Video 7 *Difficult discussions*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068172/a55255ebd6>

See if you can spot how the assistant shows empathy, builds rapport and is sensitive to the embarrassing nature of the consultation.

What techniques does she use to make the person feel comfortable?

3. Watch Video 8 *Beware the judgemental approach*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068173/97650291b4>



- Imagine you are the patient. How did the assistant's approach make you feel?
- How does the assistant give **advice**?
- Does she appear **judgemental**?
- Do you think she takes a **patient-centred approach**?
- Make a note of the things the assistant **could have done better**.

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com (Hotspots 3 and 7) for more learning on this subject.

Actively listening is just as important as saying the right words. Look at Card 4 to find out more.

Remember

...whether you are having a short or a long consultation, developing a relationship with the person is vital to create trust and rapport so that each person gets the best from the consultation.

During a consultation you need to gather information from the person and **identify the problem they want to discuss**. As you listen to the person's story you should be able to **find out what they already know** and what information is important to them. Any information and advice you provide in a consultation should be **easy to understand and free of jargon**. Your aim is to help the person to move forward with a plan **they feel comfortable** with.

Is this what someone would say about your pharmacy?

"I wouldn't change a thing. I've been coming here for a while, and they have always been so helpful. I feel like I'm a part of their family."

"So, we've talked about the different painkillers and you would like to try some regular paracetamol tablets. Is that right?"

Top tips

- Establish **what the person knows** and what they would find helpful to know.
- Provide **important information first**.
- Provide information in **manageable chunks** and **check that they understand** by asking them to repeat back what you have said – often described as 'chunk and check'.
- Use **leaflets and diagrams** to explain and give information, but make sure they are appropriate – remember, some people can't read and they hide it well.
- Explain the **options and the benefits** or outcomes of these options.
- Provide the person with enough information so that they can take **responsibility for their own care**.
- **Summarise** the agreed plan and make sure the person is happy with it.

Try out the activities overleaf.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. In Video 9 *Delivering brief advice*, we see how they are agreeing the plan together

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068171/e214027a1a>



You may recognise this story from previous activities. About a minute into the video the pharmacy assistant raises the subject of smoking. From this point, watch the video and look out for the pharmacy assistant doing the following:

- **raising the subject** of smoking
- asking if the person has heard about **passive smoking**
- explaining what passive smoking is in **language the person understands**
- explaining the **options and the benefits** of these options
- using a **leaflet** to explain and give information
- providing the person with enough information so that they can take **responsibility for their own care**
- sharing and **agreeing the plan**.

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com (Hotspot 7) for more learning on this subject.

Remember

...any information and advice that you provide, whether verbally or written (for example, in a leaflet) should support the person to take the next steps that you have agreed together.

Look at Card 9
for what to
consider when you
want to end the
consultation.

Closing or ending the consultation in the right way is important. You want to be sure that the person is clear about the plan they have agreed to follow, as well as what they need to do if things don't go according to plan.

Community pharmacies should keep a record of the advice given to people. Do you?

Would everyone who comes into your pharmacy say this?

"I know that if I have a question or problem about my health, I can come here and ask for a consultation."

Top tips

Remember these points when you close a consultation:

- **Shared decision making** - if you have provided advice or a product, confirm the person is happy with the plan.
- **Summarise** - ask the person to tell you what they are going to do, for example, *"Can we just go back over what we have said before you go. Can you just tell me how you are going to take this medicine?"*.
- **Safety net** – explain to the person what they should do if things don't go according to plan, for example, *"I explained that you should continue to use the eye drops for five days even if the symptoms go before that. If it hasn't cleared up by then please come back and see the pharmacist or make a doctor's appointment"*.
- **Referral** - if your advice has been to refer the person to the doctor or another healthcare professional try to make this as easy as possible for the person, for example, *"If you ring the surgery at 8am you should be able to get an appointment for that day"*.

Try out the activities overleaf.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Think about closing the consultation when you watch Video 2 *Hello my name is...*

<https://vimeo.com/user18926787/review/148068166/cd1fd0bbd0>



Watch the video of the pharmacy assistant and a concerned mother and focus specifically on how the assistant closes the consultation. As you watch the video listen for the words she uses to:

- explain the options and **agree a plan**
- close the consultation and **provide a safety net**.

Write down some of the words and phrases that you could use when closing your consultations.

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com for more learning on this subject.

Remember

...closing is an important part of the consultation.

...make sure the person knows what to do if the symptoms don't get better or if they get worse.

...ask the customer if they want you to write down the important points.

Look at
Card 10 to find
out more about
how to overcome
barriers in a
consultation.

However good your communication skills are, there will be times when the consultation does not go to plan. Telephone conversations present their own challenges as you cannot see each other to read each other's body language.

Possible barriers to consultations include:

- a lack of skill or **experience**
- not using open **body language**
- **language barriers** – your's and your customer's
- not demonstrating appropriate **empathy**
- not being aware of someone's **communication problems**, eg, hearing difficulties
- **physical barriers**, such as a cluttered counter, or sitting behind a desk in a consultation room
- **you!** - we are all human and you may be having a bad day; you could be tired, stressed or short of time.

Try out the activities overleaf.

Top tips

- Always give your **name and job role** when answering the phone.
- Make sure you **cannot be overheard** by other people.
- Make sure you know who you are talking to. Is it the patient, a family member or a carer? Be aware of **confidentiality** issues.
- Think about your **tone of voice** – remember that on the telephone it is only your voice that is communicating – not your body language.
- **Repeat the question** they have asked you, to confirm you have understood their request.
- Consider that the person may have hearing difficulties – have they heard you properly? **Ask them to repeat back** to you the information or advice you have given.
- **Make a note** of the date, time and detail of the call on the patient's record.

Do you have a cordless telephone, so that you can take the conversation to a more private area of the pharmacy?

10 Overcoming barriers

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Have you ever considered the barriers created by a telephone conversation, which are not there in face-to-face meetings?

Sit back to back with a friend, family member, or colleague and have a discussion for a minute or so about what you did last weekend or what you had for dinner last night. Now face each other and have the same conversation.

When you were sitting back to back did you find that you...

- couldn't **hear properly**?
- couldn't tell what the other person was thinking because you couldn't see their **facial expressions**?
- couldn't be sure the other person had **understood** what you said?
- couldn't be sure the other person was actually **listening** to you?

2. People with dementia often have problems communicating. Difficulties with communication can be upsetting and frustrating for the person with dementia and for those around them, but there are lots of ways to help make sure that you understand each other. To learn about top tips for communicating with people with dementia, visit the Alzheimer's Society website and download the document: *Communicating*, or listen to the audio version of the document:

www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=130



All members of the pharmacy team, including delivery drivers, can use these tips to communicate better with everyone.

Visit the *Consultation skills* learning topic at: www.thelearningpharmacy.com (Hotspots 9, 10 and 11) for more learning on this subject.

Remember

... being aware of the barriers to good communication will help you overcome them.

Card 6
provides useful
tips on body
language.

Top tips

Now it's your turn to have a go! Before you work through this card make sure you have worked on the different activities presented on Cards 1 – 10 and watched all the videos. Now is your chance to practise with your colleagues, family or friends.

Role play is ideal for developing your own consultation skills.

"All the staff at my pharmacy make me feel they care about me – they always have time for me and are interested."

On the other side of this card is a role play activity where you are the pharmacy team member and someone else acts as a customer. Ideally, a third person should observe the consultation.

The story is the same one that was detailed on Card 9, so you may want to go back and watch that video again before you do the role play.

Here are the things the observer will be looking for.

You should:

- **welcome** the person politely and introduce yourself
- use good **body language** (arms and hands not folded, direct eye contact)
- use words the person understands and **avoid jargon**
- speak clearly with a good **tone of voice**
- use **open questions** to gather information
- check the person's **understanding**
- use **reflective listening** - that means actively listening and reflecting back all the key points
- explain the options and **agree a plan**
- close the consultation and **provide a safety net**.

Activities - putting it into practice

1. Use this role play to practise all you have learned so far

Follow the instructions on the front of this card. You could video yourself using any mobile device if you want to check how you have done. (Make sure everyone appearing in the video is happy to be filmed.)

Brief for the pharmacy team member

It is a busy Thursday morning and you go to help out on the medicines counter. A young woman appears and is a little anxious. She has a packet of cigarettes in her hand. She asks for a cough medicine for her child.

Brief for the customer

You have come to the pharmacy for a bottle of cough medicine for your child and so you appear a bit anxious. Only provide this information if asked:

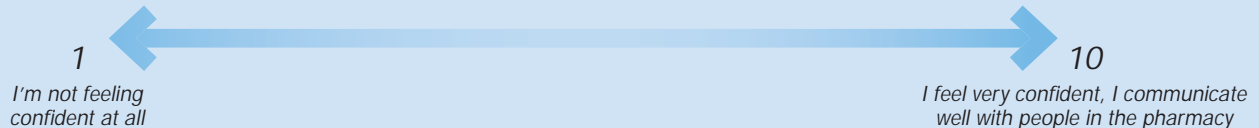
- you would like a cough medicine for your son who is three years old
- the cough started about two-and-a-half weeks ago when he caught a cold. The cough sounds very dry and tickly but he is not bringing up any phlegm.
- the cough is much worse at night, neither of you are getting much sleep and you are worried he might stop breathing
- he is not wheezing and he does not have a fever
- he is drinking normally but is not eating as much as usual
- he has had all his vaccinations and you don't have any pets.

Brief for the observer

Use the top tips on the other side of this card to observe the skills of the pharmacy team member. At the end of the role play discuss with the pharmacy team member what they did well and how they could improve.

How confident are you now?

On Card 1 you reflected on how confident you felt about your communication and consultation skills. Now you have worked through all the cards have you moved along the arrow?



Remember

...the *Consultation skills* learning topic of:
www.thelearningpharmacy.com has 12 hotspots where you will find more learning for the whole pharmacy team:

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