

# Psychologically Safe Questioning



## Recommendations

- Create an atmosphere of respect - let learners know you will probe and the purpose of the probing
- Ask questions that are at an appropriate level for learners
- Give sufficient time for answers by allowing silence or 'wait time'
- Allow learners to say 'I don't know' or ask for help from others
- Prompt learners to voice what they do know when they say don't
- Use verbal and non-verbal communication to show support to learners while they are challenged
- Do not overlook or ignore inadequate performance; correct with compassion (and privately if possible)



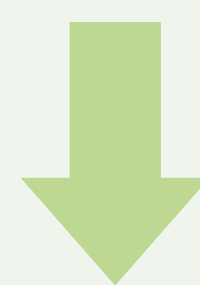
## Example of Psychological Safety Questioning

In most cases, educators use this mechanism of questioning that can end further thinking and discussion:

- **Initiate** (educator)  
"Sally, how do we treat hypertension in this patient?"
- **Respond** (learner)  
"I would start by talking to the patient about some lifestyle changes"
- **Evaluate** (educator)  
"Good, that's right"

*In the I-R-E pattern, use the Third-Turn Response to prompt and probe further and invite learner responses which can advance learning.*

## Try this instead:



Third-Turn response examples replace the last response E (Evaluate) above:

- "Can someone explain why that is a good option at the moment?"
- "Would someone like to challenge that? Are there other things we should consider?"
- "Under what circumstances might we consider X intervention?"

*This is a great tool to use on rounds and during work with multiple learners at one time. The third-turn mechanism of questioning gets more learners involved and supports the team spirit of learning.*

Learn more at  
<https://cme.smhs.gwu.edu/smhs-center-for-faculty-excellence>

