

# Risk Communication Workshop

## National Pesticide Information Center

Day 1 – July 27, 2022

Specialists at the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) use the following checklists as guides when talking about pesticide risks. Please understand that not all of these steps are always followed, and not always in this order. It's important to customize your conversation to meet the concerns of the other person.

### Components of a Conversation about Pesticide Risk

- Listen, ask questions, paraphrase their concerns** – The importance of this step cannot be understated. See more about active listening below.
- Respond in terms of “risk” rather than “safety.”** – Some helpful language is provided on page 2.
- Toxicity information** – Do you have product information to talk about like the Signal Word? Or more?
- Exposure information** – who, and how, could someone be exposed? Where is the risk of exposure increased?
- Benefit(s) of the application, when appropriate** – “Benefit” can be a matter of opinion. Is it a benefit to them or someone else? It is not always appropriate to talk about benefit.
- Action items within their control** – sometimes these are considered “common sense” steps. Discuss them anyway. These are steps that can reduce exposure for people, animals, or the environment.
- Where to get more information** – Know your resources and where they may find better information for their situation, if appropriate.

### Components of Active Listening

- Minimal encouragements** – verbal or nonverbal (nodding). Do not confuse this with agreement. Avoid using “yes” as you follow along with their story.
- Paraphrasing** – to clarify the information they're providing so you can understand more fully.
- Mirroring/Reflecting** – specifically repeating back to them the last words they used.
- Emotion Labeling/Naming** – if you observe they are upset, frustrated, or exhibiting other emotions, express what you've noticed
- Ask Open-Ended Questions** – allow them to identify what the most important topics of their story are.
- "I" Messages** – focus on what it is that you hear from them and what you understand from their story.
- Effective Pauses/Silence** – You should not be forming your response as they speak. This means you may need a few seconds after their finished to consider their information or request.



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### Language Helper and Useful Phrases

These phrases are not universally applicable to all pesticide risk conversations. Use them as a place to start as you develop your own favorites. Always customize your conversation, and the language you use, to the specific situation. Sometimes what works for one conversation is not appropriate for another.

#### Listening

- I'm sorry. That sounds like it's been frustrating for you. I can't imagine what you're going through.
- Is this something you've dealt with before?
- Can you please tell me more about that?

#### Boundaries and Expectations

- Unfortunately, I cannot discuss/provide [that information] because it's outside of my expertise. I'm not specialized in that area.
- Let's talk about how I can help today. I'd like to explain what kind of information I can provide.

#### Risk

- The word "safe" means different things to different people, that's why I'm going to talk about risk instead.
- When we think about risk, the first thing that comes to mind is usually "how toxic is it?" but we also need to think about how people/animals/the environment can be exposed. Both parts are necessary to understand the risks.

#### Action Items Within Their Control – Reducing Risk

- It sounds like you've already taken [a lot of] steps to reduce your risk.
- I understand someone else may be doing the application, but there are options within your control.
- Let's talk about some of the options that are within your control.
- I won't be able to tell you what to do next, but my goal is to give you options and information so you can make the best decision for you [and your family/in your situation].

### Relevant Contacts and Further Reading

- **Poison Control** (800.222.1222) – Your local poison center can answer non-emergency questions, too.
- **Mother to Baby** (866.626.6847) <https://mothertobaby.org> – for questions about exposure during pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- **Is It Safe?** <http://npic.orst.edu/factsheets/isitsafe.html> - this fact sheet was written for pest control professionals but contains helpful tips for any conversation about pesticide risk.
- **Debunking Handbook** <https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/debunking-handbook-2020/> - This resource was written to address misinformation about climate change but is a useful guide for anyone navigating misinformation about controversial topics.