

CanMEDS Medical Expert  
Teaching tool T7  
Coaching

**I don’t know activity to develop help-seeking behaviours[[1]](#endnote-1)**

*The content below was created by S Glover Takahashi based on the I Don’t Know Tool from* from Smith R. Thoughts for new medical students at a new medical school. BMJ. 2003; 327.7429: 1430*. You may use, reproduce and modify this content for your own non-commercial purposes provided that your modifications are clearly indicated and you provide attribution to the original author. The original author or the Royal College may revoke this permission at any time by providing written notice.*

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**Instructions for Teacher:**

• Ask a learner questions of increasing difficulty.

• Stay neutral as the questions become increasingly less accurate. Just accept the answers.

• Eventually — and it may take a while — a learner will say: “I don’t know.”

• When the learner says, “I don’t know” reward them (e.g. applause, box of Smarties)

• Then discuss the importance of those three words.

• Discuss how to become comfortable with not knowing, asking for help, where/how to get help.

• You may adapt this approach by making it a subtheme for rounds on a given day and done in groups.

**Comments:**

1. Adapted from Smith R. Thoughts for new medical students at a new medical school. *BMJ*. 2003; 327.7429: 1430. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)