

## Job Aid: 5 Whys and Fishbone Diagrams

### Overview

The 5 Whys and fishbone diagrams help practices identify obstacles to good performance and what causes them. They can also be used to identify the factors contributing to exemplary performance in order to replicate them.

The 5 Whys and fishbone diagrams can be used on their own or as a follow-up to techniques like the “last 10 patients” chart audit or fall-out analysis.

### The 5 Whys

The 5 Whys involves asking and answering the question "Why?" five times or as many times as it takes to get to the "root cause" or end of the causal chain.

### Three Steps to the 5 Whys

1. Create a problem statement, such as, “Patients have stopped attending our diabetes self-management classes.”
2. Ask “Why?” five times, or as many times as needed until a root cause is identified. You’ve arrived at a root cause when no other "why?" can be asked that would lead to a meaningful answer or action.

#### Introduction to the 5 whys

Ask...



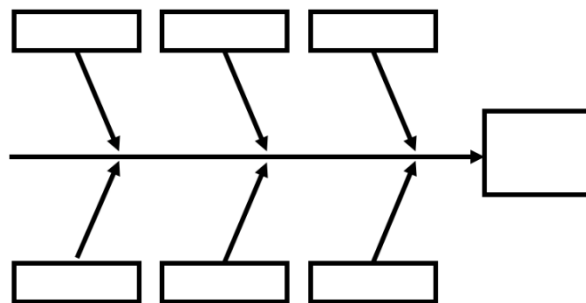
Potential root cause

3. Design a change or counter-measure to correct the problem. Ask the practice:
  - "What ideas do you have for changes to address this?"
  - "Which idea do you want to prioritize and test first?"Suggest they use the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) process to test the change.

## Fishbone Diagrams

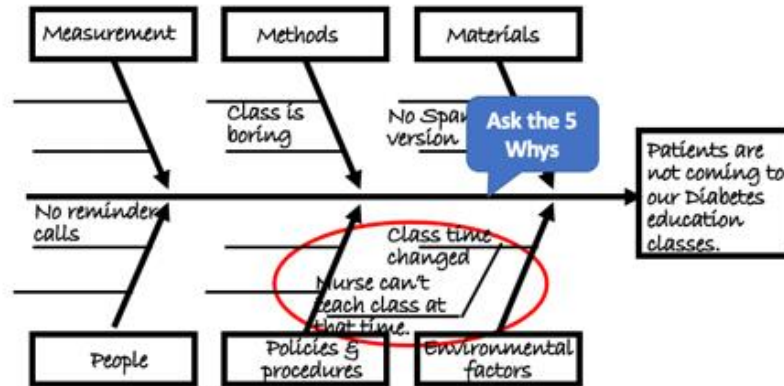
Fishbone diagrams are another tool for helping a practice identify factors that are "causing" obstacles or affecting performance. They are also called cause-and-effect diagrams. Practices then use this information to generate and prioritize ideas for improvement.

### Five steps to creating a fishbone diagram



1. Create a problem statement and write it at the "head" of the fish. This is the "effect."
2. Define the categories of possible causes and write them at the end of each rib. Practices can create their own or use already existing category sets like this healthcare one: people, materials, methods, measurement, environmental factors, and policies and procedures.
3. Brainstorm "causes" under each category.
  - Ask "Why does this happen?" to stimulate brainstorming.
  - Draw lines off of each rib and write down "causes."
  - Place causes in more than one category if appropriate.
  - Ask practice to brainstorm possible causes for each category.

- Use the "5 Whys" process to analyze the most important causes further. Add additional "bones" to the fish to record these.



- Use the causes to generate change ideas to test. Ask the practice:
  - "What ideas do you have to address this?"
  - "Which idea do you want to try first?"

**Tip:** If you are using a white board or flip chart, take a picture of the diagram with your phone and email it to the team for them to review.