

What works notes

Short, plain-language syntheses on questions practitioners keep asking — each with a clear statement of how confident the evidence lets us be.

About this series

Each issue answers one question practitioners actually ask, in about a page, and never overstates what the evidence supports. A confidence rating sits next to the answer, always — it describes the evidence, not the importance of the question.

How we rate confidence

Rating	What it means
High confidence	Multiple well-designed studies, in relevant settings, point the same direction.
Moderate confidence	The evidence is reasonably consistent but limited in size, setting, or design.
Limited evidence	A small number of studies exist and point in a direction, but could easily be revised.
Insufficient evidence	Too little relevant evidence exists to say either way.

SAMPLE ISSUE — FOR ILLUSTRATION

Do reminder calls increase attendance at follow-up appointments?

Bottom line: Reminder contact of some kind generally helps, but the format matters less than making sure the message actually reaches the person.

What we found: Studies on appointment reminders across health and social-service settings generally find that some form of reminder — call, text, or letter — reduces no-shows compared with no reminder at all. Differences between reminder formats are smaller and less consistent than the gap between "reminder" and "no reminder."

How confident we are: Moderate confidence — the "reminders help" pattern shows up often, but which reminder format works best varies by population and setting.

What this doesn't tell us: Whether reminder calls specifically outperform texts for your population, or what the right number of reminders is before they stop helping.

Practical implication: If you're not currently reminding people at all, that's the higher-value fix. If you already remind people, test format and timing against your own no-show data rather than assuming calls beat texts.

Notes for using this series

A low confidence rating isn't a reason to ignore a brief — it's a reason to treat the answer as a starting hypothesis, not a settled fact. Briefs are revisited as evidence changes; check the "last reviewed" line before relying on one for a major decision. Last reviewed: [Month Year].

Questions this series might take on next

- Does peer support improve retention in long-term programs?
- Is text-message follow-up as effective as phone calls for this population?
- How long can a survey be before response quality drops?
- Does offering choice of appointment time change show-up rates?

Want help putting this into practice?

Connect with CometX to talk through your evaluation, research, or reporting needs.