

# Emergency Situations

A leaflet for healthcare staff



*Making conversations easier*

# Clickable contents

## Connect

Greetings and introductions

Non-verbal behaviour

Involve the patient

Demonstrating empathy

## Understand

Listening to understand

## Communicate

Prepare and plan

Follow your plan

Follow up

## Three magic keys

Emergency situations bring particular challenges in terms of communication. This card reviews the skills that support effective communication and introduces a few additional tactics that can be used when time is tight and emotion increases.



Brings you back to contents



# Emergency Situations

## Connect

### Greetings and introductions

When emotion is high,  
greetings and introductions  
will be concise

*Hello, my name is Peter.  
I am the doctor on call*

*Is it Michael or ...?*

*Who is with you  
here today?*



### Communication skills

- ☐ Warm greeting
- ☐ Introductions
- ☐ Check patient's name & how they like to be addressed
- ☐ Check who is with the patient



# Emergency Situations

## Connect

### Non-verbal behaviour



When emotion is high, pace, pitch and tone may change



### Communication skills

- ☐ Facial expression
- ☐ Appropriate eye contact
- ☐ Open body language
- ☐ Pace, pitch and tone of voice
- ☐ Professional appearance



# Emergency Situations

## Connect

### Involve the patient

*We are in this together*

*Is it ok if I take your  
blood pressure?*

*I am here. You  
are not alone*

Involving the patient during an emergency helps to build connections, trust and psychological safety



### Communication skills

- ☐ Establish that the patient can hear and understand you
- ☐ Share your thinking
- ☐ Ask permission for what you are doing
- ☐ The right words & phrases



# Emergency Situations

## Connect

### Demonstrating empathy

*You look frustrated*

*You sound worried  
when you say that*

*Its been really  
tough for you*

When emotion is  
high, communication  
cannot flow



### Communication skills

**G.I.V.E. to connect, understand, and support**

**G**

**Get**

that it's emotion

**I**

**Identify**

the emotion

**V**

**Validate**

by acknowledging feelings

**E**

**Explore**

to better understand the emotion



# Emergency Situations

## Connect

### Demonstrating empathy

#### TIP

Emotion has a significant impact on communication. We need to **identify** the emotion and then consider the **intensity** of that emotion.

Looking at the **intensity** of the emotion, we use the analogy of the see-saw: when emotion is high, communication is only a one-way route. When emotion is high, it's time to **listen** (not to talk) as the person who is emotional will not hear what we are saying. So, allow them time to vent, encouraging the person to talk, using good verbal and nonverbal active listening skills.



The other person will then feel **listened to, understood** and **respected**. The emotion (like the see-saw) will come down and communication can flow.



# Emergency Situations

## Understand

### Listening to understand

Listen for:

1. **Information:** facts, figures, times, places and so on
2. **Emotion:** intensity, type of emotion and triggers
3. **What is important to the patient:** values, beliefs, needs (*core emotional concerns*) and wants

*Let me check if I have this right; you have been waiting in the emergency department for 8 hours, you are concerned that your daughter may have had a seizure, you think she needs a CT scan (paraphrase) and all this waiting and worrying is making you angry (labelled emotion).*

*If I understand correctly, you are feeling angry about being told about...*

### Communication skills

- ☐ Summaries
- ☐ Emotional labelling
- ☐ Paraphrase





# Emergency Situations

## Understand

### Listening to understand

*I get the feeling that...*

*I hear/see...*

*It seems...*

*It feels as if...*

*You sound pretty  
upset about...  
You seem... I hear...  
I can see...*



#### TIP

Emergencies can affect our normal capacity to cope, increasing emotions and inhibiting ability to act rationally. Being heard, understood and respected is reassuring to everyone, particularly when they feel isolated or alone. Responding to what they have said (**information**), how they feel (**emotion**) and what is important to them (**values, beliefs, needs, wants**) will bring comfort and connection.



# Emergency Situations

## Communicate

### Prepare and plan

*You can help by...*

*We won't have time at that stage to explain everything but we promise to answer any questions afterwards*

*There may be times when the team have to act quickly, bring in other colleagues, and occasionally move to theatre. This may happen when...*



### Communication tactics

- ☐ Create a plan and make it part of the routine/process
- ☐ Ensure everyone knows about it
- ☐ Ensure everyone has a job to do and knows their role in the emergency situation
- ☐ Work towards 'no surprises'
- ☐ Use core emotional concerns (**appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, role and status**) as a guide



# Emergency Situations

Communicate

## Prepare and plan

*Our training and experience means that situations like that are normal for us, but we appreciate it may appear otherwise to you*

*You will likely experience...*



### TIP

Preparation and planning helps with spontaneous situations. Controlling emotion through self awareness and use of core emotional concerns (**appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, role and status**) is a useful tactic in emergency situations.



# Emergency Situations

## Communicate

### Follow your plan

*We prepared for this...*

*Peter remember we spoke about...*

### Communication tactics

- ☐ Single Point Of Contact (SPOC) for communication with patient/family
- ☐ Listen and respond
- ☐ Keep explanations concise
- ☐ Retain composure/manage your own emotion
- ☐ Reassure and use core emotional concerns to keep that connection

### TIP

Core emotional concerns convey human needs that are important to almost everyone in virtually every emergency or crisis. By addressing these core emotional concerns (**appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, role and status**) we can be successful and effective in dealing with emergency situations. The quickest and most effective way to support someone's core emotional concerns is to listen, to properly listen to understand.



# Emergency Situations

## Communicate

### Follow up

*You mention...  
Why do you believe  
that happened?*

*What do you feel should  
have been done differently?*

*I'm sorry you experienced that*



### Communication tactics

- ☐ Check-in with them
- ☐ Listen to understand
- ☐ Repair if required
- ☐ Appropriate curiosity – reflect back and ask questions
- ☐ Offer reassurance
- ☐ Use core emotional concerns (**appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, role and status**) as a framework
- ☐ Offer explanations if appropriate



# Emergency Situations

Communicate

Follow up

*Would it help if I share why we did what we did and said what we said?*

*What would help right now?*

*I hear you*



## TIP

Even with the best planning, emergency situations can still bring surprises including adverse experiences for those involved. Adverse experiences can leave psychological wounds. Having a follow up discussion can help address any concerns or questions in a timely way. During a follow up discussion, it is possible to explore experiences, address issues and offer explanations at an early stage.



# Emergency Situations



## Three magic keys

*I'm sorry I was late...*

*I'm sorry I raised my voice*

### TIP

We are all human and occasionally we make mistakes. This simple word **Sorry** helps us to build rapport with patients and colleagues.

**Thank you:** seems easy to say, but we know this is not always the case. It is not merely a kind word to use with strangers, in order to be polite. It is necessary to know how to say thank you, to patients and colleagues.

Asking permission is knowing how to enter somebody else's life with courtesy.

Sometimes we forget to ask permission when working with patients and colleagues.

**Please** is a kind request that conveys respect and care.

[www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme](http://www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme)



@NHCPprogramme

This Skills Card is the work of Paul Kinnersley (EACH & Cardiff University), Peter Gillen & Eva Doherty (RCSI) & Winifred Ryan (HSE) with special thanks to Ms Cathy MacDonald for sharing her work on how to connect, understand and communicate in crisis situations.

