



National Healthcare
Communication
Programme

Building the relationship

A leaflet for healthcare staff



Making conversations easier

Building the relationship

Clickable contents

1. Greetings and introductions
2. Non-verbal behaviour
3. Involve the patient
4. Demonstrate empathy



Brings you back to contents

“

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou, 1928 - 2014



Building the relationship

1. Greetings and introductions

Warm greeting

Greet the patient with a warm 'hello'

Consider non-verbal approaches like shaking hands

Introduce yourself (name and role)

Hello, my name is Claire Fitzpatrick and I am the midwife looking after you today.

Communication skills

- ☐ Warm greeting
- ☐ Introduce yourself
- ☐ Check the patient's name
- ☐ Check how the patient likes to be addressed
- ☐ Use the patient's name, particularly when demonstrating empathy
- ☐ Check who is with the patient (name/relationship)



Building the relationship

1. Greetings and introductions (contd.)

Check the patient's name and how they like to be addressed

It's Margaret Grace, is it? And what do you like to be called... is it Margaret or...?

Use the patient's name, particularly when demonstrating empathy

*That sounds like it was very tough for you **Peter***

Check who is with the patient (name/relationship)

And who is with you here today?



Check if the patient consents to that person being involved in conversations about their care.

TIP

Welcoming the patient is your opportunity to make a first impression and to start to build rapport, trust and confidence.



Building the relationship

2. Non-verbal behaviour

Facial expression

Maintain a warm facial expression (smiling if appropriate).



Facial expressions are a common form of non-verbal communication. Examples include smiling, crying and grimacing.

Eye contact



Make and maintain appropriate eye contact with the patient.



Our eyes convey how we feel and what we are thinking.

Communication skills

- ☐ Facial expression
- ☐ Eye contact
- ☐ Open body language
- ☐ Pace, pitch and tone
- ☐ Touch
- ☐ Space
- ☐ Maintain focus on the patient



Building the relationship

2. Non-verbal behaviour (contd.)

Open body language

How we sit, stand or walk can convey strong messages.



Leaning forward can demonstrate interest. A relaxed posture is important so the patient doesn't feel rushed.

Pace, pitch and tone

Use appropriate pitch, slow pace and a warm tone of voice.



It is often through our pace, pitch and tone that we reveal our feelings and attitudes.



Building the relationship

2. Non-verbal behaviour (contd.)



Touch

Touch can be used to show support, care and empathy.

A handshake or a hand on the arm or shoulder if the patient becomes upset.

Maintain focus on the patient

That's a really important point, I am just going to make a note of it now in your record...



Look at the patient when they are talking to you. If you need to make a note in the patient record, pause and explain to the patient what you are doing.



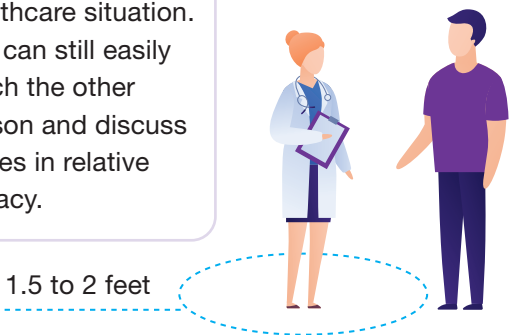
Building the relationship

2. Non-verbal behaviour (contd.)

Consider the space between you and the patient. 1.5 to 2 feet is a comfortable space for talking in a healthcare situation. You can still easily touch the other person and discuss issues in relative privacy.

Space

Give your patient space while staying connected with them



TIP

Demonstrating relaxed and open non-verbal behaviour will build rapport and help to put the patient at ease. Remember that non-verbals are 'two-way'. Observing and interpreting the patient's nonverbals helps us to understand how the patient is feeling or the extent to which they agree with or understand the information being shared with them.



Building the relationship

3. Involving the patient

Establish that the patient can hear and understand you

Can you hear me ok? Is it better for you if I sit on this side?

Little things...
but they can
make a big
difference

Attend to their physical comfort

Are you comfortable? Would you like to sit up a little before we start?



Communication skills

- ☐ Establish that the patient can hear and understand you
- ☐ Attend to their physical comfort
- ☐ Explain the purpose and structure of the consultation
- ☐ Share your thinking
- ☐ Explain your rationale
- ☐ Ask permission for what you are doing



Building the relationship

3. Involving the patient (contd.)

Explain the purpose and structure of the consultation

I am going to talk to you first and then Mr Collins, the hand surgeon will join us so that we can plan your treatment together...

Share your thinking

What I am thinking now is you might be getting some mild side-effects from...?

Explain your rationale

I am asking you this question because...



Some questions may be obvious to us, but to the patient they may appear worrying...



Building the relationship

3. Involving the patient (contd.)

Ask permission for what you are doing

*Is it ok if I take your blood pressure?...
Would it be ok if we spent a few
minutes talking about...?*



TIP

We meet patients every day and for us the conversation or consultation can be routine. For the patient, however, the visit can be worrying and distressing. Pay attention to the patient's nonverbals (*body language, eye contact, pace, pitch and tone*). Using these core skills helps build trust and confidence with patients and puts them at the centre of their care.



Building the relationship

4. Demonstrate empathy

Identify the feeling or emotion. Even if you initially get the emotion wrong, this effort demonstrates to the person that you are trying to understand where they are coming from. Sit with the emotion, don't try to 'fix' it.

Get the emotion

Pause when you notice emotion

We do not need to resolve emotions. Respond with 'connection', not information.



Communication skills

- ☐ **Get** the emotion
- ☐ **Identify** the emotion
- ☐ **Validate** by acknowledging feelings
- ☐ **Explore** to better understand



Building the relationship

4. Demonstrate empathy (contd.)

Identify the emotion

You look worried when you say that?

Validate by acknowledging feelings

You sound pretty upset about... You seem... I hear... It sounds like you have felt overwhelmed at times.



Validating or normalising can help to reduce feelings of isolation by focusing on the wider population... *many people feel that... we often hear... it's not unusual.*

TIP

If there are non-verbal cues, describe what you see. Use language that mirrors or reflects the patient's language.... *'it looks like you have something on your mind'.*



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4. Demonstrate empathy (contd.)

Explore to better understand

Tell me more about that...

How can we help?

What can I do to support you right now?

Would it help to talk about it?

What's scaring you the most?



Explore to better understand the emotion, or to inquire whether the other person wants to share more.

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This Skills Card is the work of Paul Kinnersley (EACH & Cardiff University), Peter Gillen & Eva Doherty (RCSI) & Winifred Ryan (HSE) with the help and support of Jonathan Silverman, Marcy Rosenbaum and many others in EACH.

