

COMMUNICATION SKILLS 101

Effective communication is a two-way process involving listening and speaking. It is a learned skill that requires practice. Listening and speaking are equally important to the process. To listen effectively, you must resist formulating your response while the other person is still speaking. The better option: allow a thoughtful pause while you both digest what has been said.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SPEAKING

- Pay attention—not just to your words, but also to your non-verbal message(s).
- Putting a desk between you and the patient and family can foster a perception of distance. If possible, position yourself at a 35 to 45 degree angle towards the patient and keep your arms relaxed and open towards their body.
- Try not to look tense or stressed, instead adopt a relaxed and calm demeanor. Look up frequently to maintain eye contact.
- *DO* smile, sit, or stand comfortably.
- Have at least 2 to 3 minutes of discussion with the patient and family before you begin to take notes. Never “doodle.” Shuffle papers as little as possible. The patient must feel that your focus is on him or her and what they are saying.
- Allow patients and families to see your notes before the end of your visit. Remember: transparency builds trust.

BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

- Limit interruptions.
- Verbally acknowledge that this situation can be difficult and assure the patient and family of your desire to help them.
- Be prepared for a variety of emotional reactions.

BUILD RAPPORT

- There are three basic ways people receive and deliver communication: visual, auditory, or emotive.
 - *“I see what you mean”*
 - *“I hear what you are saying”*
 - *“I know how you feel”* are clues to how your patient thinks and understands.
 - Use his or her “language.”
- Make eye contact and mirror slightly the posture of the person(s) you are speaking with.

FINANCIAL ADVOCACY NETWORK

DEMONSTRATE YOUR INTEREST, EMPATHY AND DESIRE TO HELP

- Speak calmly and warmly. Treat patients and families as your “guests”
- Use the appropriate language. “*I understand...*”
 - If you don’t understand what the patient or family is saying, ask leading questions.
 - For example: “*Help me be sure I understand. When you say you need help with your bills, do you mean that you don’t understand the bills or that you need help to pay the bills?*”
- Do not monopolize the conversation.
- Do not interrupt the patient.