



Being with a Patient: Getting the Setting Right

Get comfortable, sit down, and relax

Signal that you are ready to spend some time (for instance, take your coat off)

- Find as private a setting as possible

Keep your eyes on the same level as the person you are talking with

- Sit down in a chair if possible

Keep within a comfortable distance of the client

- Keep one to two feet between you
- Try to remove any major physical obstacles between you and the client.

Remember: Demonstrating too much interest by overdoing eye contact and body posture can be uncomfortable for the client.

- Be sensitive and look for the client's non-verbal clues indicating how they are reacting to you. Try to find a balance that works for both of you.

Find out whether the person wants to talk

Let them set the tone

- Allow the person you are visiting to set the pace and choose the topic for discussion.
- Don't try to initiate deep conversation without some indication that they are willing
- If unsure ask: "What do you feel like talking about?", or "Do you want to talk about this?"

Listen and show you're listening

- Listen instead of thinking about what you're going to say next
- Show you are listening: Don't interrupt, but if they interrupt, let them continue.



Communicating with the Patient

- Respond regularly to the feelings being expressed.
- State your feelings if it seems appropriate.
- Share some of your experiences – *as appropriate* – after the relationship has developed somewhat.
- Encourage patients/clients to make their own decisions.

Encourage the other person to talk

- Encourage them with a nod or saying affirmative things like “yes”, “I see”, or “Tell me more”.
- Use open-ended statements and questions
- Show you are listening by repeating one or two words from their last sentence
- Avoid “Parrot” stated feelings verbatim: (“I feel sad” – reply – “You’re feeling sad”)
- Reflect back what you’ve heard
- Check that you’ve got it right
- Check for misunderstanding

Ask gently for clarification

- Paraphrase what you think you heard
- Ask gently for confirmation
- Allow client to correct your perception if it was inaccurate

Develop Comfort with Silences

- Short periods of silence may give the client an opportunity to organize their emotions, feelings and thoughts
- When someone stops talking, don’t rush in – wait for a moment.
- You might worry when you are unsure of what to say. This may mean there is nothing to say. Although it might be difficult to remain silent, don’t be afraid to do so. Just being there is sometimes all they need. Remember they could be on medication that sometimes takes them a little longer to think.



Be yourself

- Allow your sense of humour to blossom, *as appropriate*.
- Be spontaneous.

Try Not To Change The Subject

- Observe and try and match the client's mood
- Find common ground as you spend time together.

Do Not Give Advice

- Be clear on the difference between offering information and giving advice. It is not appropriate for a Hospice Volunteer to provide advice of any kind, especially medical or legal advice.

Humour performs an essential function in helping us cope with major threats and fears: it allows us to vent – to deal with intense feelings and put things in perspective. Humour is one way to cope with things that seem insurmountable. It can help if people are sensitive and responsive to the other person's humour, rather than trying to set the mood with their own.

Avoid

Asking too many questions (initially at least).

- Offering to do physical tasks in place of simple visiting and listening.
- Initiating talk about spiritual matters or illness
- Diagnosing or categorizing i.e.- "he's in the depression stage"
- Saying "Everyone feels that way" or some similar generalization
- Please DO NOT wear perfume, cologne or after-shave.