

## Communication Tips

### ***The Dos:***

Practice active listening throughout your calls.

- Remain silent (even if it's hard). Pausing to hear what someone is saying can go a long way.
  - You may offer "hmm..." or "uh-huh"
- After asking how things are going
  - "It sounds like you're doing well"
  - "I'm sorry to hear that you're going through a tough time. There is definitely a lot of uncertainty right now, so I can see why that must be hard"
- After asking if they connected
  - "I'm so glad you were able to reach out"
  - "No worries about not connecting"
- Make your active listening specific to the patient's needs or situation
  - "Let's see if I have this right. What I'm hearing is that..."
  - "It sounds like what you're telling me is..."

It's ok to admit if you don't know something or to acknowledge imperfection.

- If someone asks you for info you can't find
  - "I'm actually not sure when they're open, but I would recommend calling during normal business hours a couple of times, and that should work out. If not, though, I can find out and call you back tomorrow if that's ok with you?"
- If a resource is closed
  - "We may not be able to connect you with everything you were referred to today given how quickly everything is changing, but I'm going to try my best to help you with what I can in the time we have."
- If you're unsure if you understand what the patient is saying
  - "Am I hearing you correctly?" "Did I miss anything?"

Make an effort to establish a sense of connection or community.

- If someone expresses gratitude or difficulties accessing a resource
  - "I'm here to help in any way I can. We can all help each other out as neighbors."

### Motivational Interviewing

- At the end of the call
  - "I encourage you to reach out to the resources we talked about. They would all be great resources to use during this difficult time."

Recognize and address emotions where appropriate (Dr. Neil Prose)

- When someone reveals a personal issue:
  - First, recognize and express understanding for the way the other person is feeling. It is important to accurately perceive their emotions.
  - Then when appropriate, offer information.
- NURS: Name, Understand, Respect, Support
  - **Name:** Try to label the emotion that the other person seems to be experiencing.
    - “I can see that you are very worried”
    - “I hear your frustration with this resource”
  - **Understand and Legitimize the feeling:**
    - “Given all that you’ve gone through, I can see why you are feeling this way.”
    - “Most people would feel this way in your situation. It’s very understandable.”
    - “Not being able to reach this resource after calling multiple times must be frustrating. I can see why you’re annoyed.”
  - **Respect:** Given generous praise when someone does something good.
    - “I’m glad you were able to reach out and schedule an appointment”
    - “I’m impressed that you’ve been able to call this resource on top of everything else you are juggling. You’re clearly able to handle a lot at once”
  - **Support:** Remind the person we are here to help!
    - “If your problem gets worse instead of better, please be sure to call.”

Practice empathizing (Coulehan, 2001)

- Sadness:
  - “That must have been a pretty painful experience for you, you sound like it was very sad.”
- Fear:
  - “Sounds like you were really frightened when you had to go to the grocery store and face the risk of contracting COVID.”
- Anger:
  - “That situation really got to you, didn’t it? With all the steps you had to take just to get to the resource office, I can imagine how angry I’d feel if that happened.”
- Distrust:
  - “It seems you’re not sure whether you should trust the organization further after hearing concerning news.”

- Ambivalence:
  - “It seems to me that you’re caught in a bind about whether to reach out again or to seek additional care”
- “I wish” statements help you enter the person’s world and convey that we don’t always have control (Quill, 2001)
  - “I wish we had a resource that would better fit your needs and situation”

***The Don’ts:***

Try to be as aware of your assumptions as possible.

- Does the person need a car to access this resource?

Avoid interrupting the other person.

- Even when someone goes on a tangent, kindly suggest returning to the conversation
  - “Would it be ok if I interrupt you to ask you more about...”

Only give information or advice when the other person wants it.

- It’s easy to give all the information someone may need, but it’s better to ask what specific information they may want.
  - “Would you like me to give you the phone number?”