



Huddle Up

Communication Series #4

Words Matter

Word choice and non-verbal cues can positively or negatively impact communication between patients and staff. The words we choose to use are important, because words shape our beliefs and impact our actions.

Words do matter—make sure the words you choose get the intended and desired result.

Do:



Focus on the Positive. Give praise and compliments. Who doesn't like when someone acknowledges their efforts? Managing life with health care concerns is hard. Try to offer at least one positive with any negative piece of information you share.



Emphasize strengths not weaknesses. “You've been doing a great job managing your blood sugar. Maintaining a blood sugar in a good range will decrease your health risks.”



Use a neutral tone of voice. Are the words you are saying being delivered in an appropriate tone of voice? Does your message match your tone?



Use a formal name when first meeting someone. Use Mr./Mrs./Ms. versus first names. Ask how they would prefer to be addressed before calling them by their first name.

Don't:



Use acronyms and medical jargon. Healthcare is full of acronyms that we often assume patients understand.



Get defensive. When a patient asks, “Did you change your gloves?” ...instead of “of course I did” say “Yes, I did, thank you for asking. I know how important it is to your safety.” or “You're right, thanks for reminding me.”