

Effective Communication Makes Life Work

Messages: The Communication Skills Book identifies four types of expression we use to communicate. We're listing the four types with our examples that you can use with your preceptee.

1. *Observations* – As the preceptee begins to walk out of the room you state, “The side rails are down.”
2. *Thoughts* – You state, “It’s unsafe for the side rails to be down.” You also think the preceptee knows this.
3. *Feelings* – You state, “I’m afraid for the patient.” You also are afraid the preceptee is careless, forgetful or overwhelmed.
4. *Needs* – You state, “I need for the patient to be safe.” You also need to discuss this with the preceptee.

In reality you can say this all together. “The side rails are down and I’m afraid the patient may fall out of bed.” Later you can discuss, “I know we both want the patients to be safe. I need to know that before you leave the room you will make sure that the patient is in a safe environment. If you look back at the room before you leave, you can evaluate the situation. Does the patient have the call button? Are the side rails up? This has occurred more than a couple of times now and we need to talk about why it’s happening.”

Communication: Yours, Mine and Ours

Nurses are doers. This is how we help our patients. We must also listen to them, observe and assess them and then effectively communicate their needs to the physician and other team members. We use the same process when we work with our preceptees. We must assess their needs and actions and effectively communicate with them to guide them toward becoming competent professionals.

When a preceptee is making the same mistake over and over, it is definitely time to sit down and have a private conversation about it. Help him trace his steps. Is he moving on to the next skill or room before finishing what he started? Ask specific questions and listen to what he is saying so you can read between the lines if necessary.

The Plan – When you plan to have a serious conversation about an issue with your preceptee, consult with the educator or manager for some ideas. Review the giving feedback handouts in your Preceptor Reference Manual. Write a script to get started. Ask yourself:

- What am I observing, thinking, feeling and wanting?
- What is the purpose of this communication?
- Is the stated purpose the same as my real purpose?
- What am I afraid of saying?
- What do I need to communicate?
- Am I focusing on the issue?

The Meeting – Practice effective communication skills:

- Observe the preceptee for facial expressions, eye contact and body language.
- Is she asking questions, giving feedback or sitting like a lump in the chair?
- Help the preceptee to identify his own observations, thoughts, feelings and needs about the situation.
- Ask her to write them down beforehand if possible. It will give both of you a starting point for discussion.
- Respond empathetically. When appropriate, be sure to state what the preceptee is doing right, and reiterate that integrating the correct way of *doing the skill* into his practice is possible.
- Work with your preceptee to develop a set routine to help the correct action become a habit.

Effective communication is critical in the empowered teaching/learning partnership. Role modeling professional communication skills is one of the most important actions you can do for your preceptee, their colleagues and their patients.

Thanks for being such a good role model!