

Micro-Skills Techniques when Consulting

Here are some ideas for techniques to use when consulting, to encourage the patient to continue with their story in their own words.

Nudging

Short encouraging words, noises, and gestures eg “go on, right, okay, yes, um-huh”, nodding, smiling.

Verbal Echoing

Repeat back the patient's last word or phrase in a mildly questioning tone of voice.

Verbal Mirroring

Adopt a similar tone of voice to the patient, similar rate of speech, use patient's own words.

Body Mirroring

Adopt a similar posture to the patient (be careful **not** to mimic).

Silence

Remain quiet and allow the patient space to think about what they want to say.

Ensure that this is a dynamic encouraging silence, with good eye contact, nodding, smiling, etc.

Soft commands

Saying straight commands (eg “go on, tell me more,” etc) can appear abrupt. Giving soft commands can be helpful, eg:

“Could you expand on that.”

“Could you tell me a little more about what happened.”

Statement as a question

Make a relevant statement as a neutral comment, and then leave a silence. The patient may respond as if you had asked a question, eg: “There's been a lot on TV recently about X...”

(Note the ellipsis... at the end of the statement... this is an effective punctuation style... and it usually works better than adding a question...)

Feedback

Tell the patient something you have noticed, eg, “You looked quite anxious when you said...”

“You have mentioned the word ‘failure’ several times...”

Checking for understanding (mini summary)

Give a brief summary of the main points the patient has mentioned so far, eg:

“So you've had it for a week, and... and... and it's not improving? Have I missed anything important?”

Explain why you are asking something

Tell the patient the reason you are asking about something, particularly if the patient may not consider it relevant, eg:

“I would just like to ask about any symptoms that might suggest this is a virus infection...”

My Friend John

Make a statement about some third party with whom the patient may or may not wish to identify, eg:

“Many young mothers get worried about having their babies immunised...”

“I remember another patient with similar symptoms who thought it was all due to stress...”