

Communication Tips While Wearing a Face Mask

Communicating with patients while wearing a face mask can be extremely challenging at times and frustrating for both patients and staff. Mask wearing can create even more communication challenges with our elder patients and those with dementia or cognitive impairments. Masks make it harder for patients to recognize people, hear voices, read lips, and identify what someone is feeling.

We realize now more than ever how non-verbal cues play a vital role in daily communication. Our body language, hand gestures, posture, facial expressions, and tone of voice convey meaning and emotion when we communicate.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS THAT CAN HELP IMPROVE COMMUNICATION:

- Introduce yourself, your role and purpose for your visit.
- Slow down your speech and use a loud clear voice.
- Use a positive tone of voice. Tone can be equally as impactful as the words you are speaking.
- Use simple language.
- Use positive body language such as;
 - maintaining eye contact
 - displaying an open posture (do not cross your arms)
 - 'smile with your eyes'
 - stand upright
- Nod when appropriate to acknowledge you are listening and have understood.
- Use your eyes and eyebrows to convey emotion. Let your eyebrows tell the story.
 - Happiness can be seen by raised eyebrows.
 - Eyebrows pinched together and eyes drooping can indicate sadness.
 - Eyebrows in a "V" can convey anger.
- Name emotions, e.g. "I'm happy to see you..."
- Use gestures, objects and pointing, e.g. thumbs up, waving and object choices
- Write down keywords.
- As things are busy and stressful, try not to let that be reflective in your voice. Be straightforward and try to stay calm.