

Approaching and Communicating with Patients and Clients

- A person who is confused

- Visit in a quiet, distraction-free environment if possible.
- Simplify your topic of conversation to expect a simple “yes” or “no” response and ask one question at a time.
- Approach the person slowly in their line of sight, touch them gently on the arm or shoulder before speaking to let them know you are there and use their name often.
- Speak clearly, not too quickly and maintain eye contact, using minimal hand movements towards them.
- Never talk about someone in their presence without including them in the conversation.
- Never talk to an adult as if to a child. Do not patronise them, for example by patting them on the head or talking ‘baby talk’.
- If the person you are visiting is unable to speak, or their speech is difficult to understand:
 - Resist the temptation to just say “yes”, nod or pretend to understand.
 - Repeat key words if the person doesn’t understand at first.
 - Do not finish their sentences for them or rush them in any way.
 - The appropriate communication strategy will vary considerably with the individual. A member of staff should be able to provide guidance regarding the best method to adopt.
- Some people may have limited attention spans: watch for signs of uneasiness, restlessness, agitation or just ignoring you and end the visit on a positive note with a sense of closure.
- Encourage reminiscence, which can provide a source of comfort as well as an ‘anchor’ to reality.
- Always retain a sense of humour and cultivate a positive and accepting attitude.
- You must always be accompanied by a member of staff when on visits to patients in mental health units, with vulnerable adults or children.

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