

# Optimizing the 6 Skill Sets of Patient Communication

Sacramento District Dental Society

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## Context

*"It follows that dentists who, for the most part, avoid explanations in favor of helping patients to think clearly are more likely to influence their behavior."*

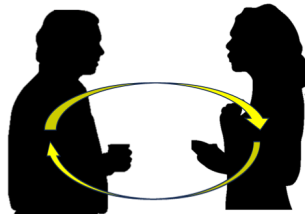
Robert F. Barkley DSS, 1972

## Emotional Influence

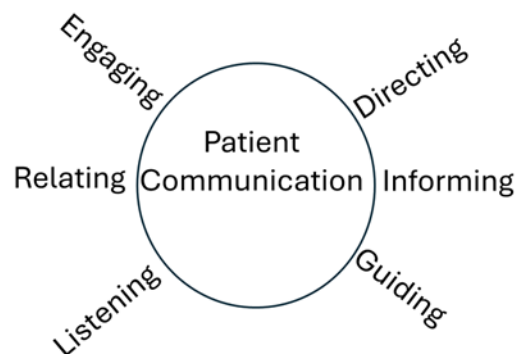
**Emotion** – to stir up

**Influence** – a flowing from the heavens that acts upon the character and destiny of people; today, it refers to the power of individuals to affect the experience and behavior of others.

**Emotional Influence** – an interpersonal process in which one person's emotional state affects another's emotional state and vice-versa.



## 6 Skill Sets of Patient Communication



## 1. Engaging - the skill of attracting and maintaining a patient's attention and generating a felt sense of emotional safeness

- Be aware of how your tone of voice, eye-to-eye contact, and facial expressions affect a patient's social engagement system outside of awareness
- Practice SOLER
  - **Square** - face people squarely
  - **Open** - an open posture is generally experienced as non-threatening and involved
  - **Lean forward slightly** - a slight leaning forward demonstrates active interest
  - **Eye contact** - regular but varied eye contact is experienced as interest in the person
  - **Relax** - let your body relax
- What is the experience you desire for yourself as you engage with patients?
  
- Vagal Stimulation under stress
  - Shake It Off
  - Facial Massage

## 2. Relating - the skill of creating connection

- How do you connect with patients?
- Do you have your favorite questions?
- Is it an intentional connection or just a well-used pattern?
- Do you use the patient's name?
- Are you SOLER when you relate?

### 3. Listening - the skill of paying attention to a patient's communications and communicating that you are paying attention.

- Which of the 3 primary active listening skills do you think you use most often?
  - **Paraphrasing** - a concise restatement of the essence of a verbal communication - focus is on content
  - **Reflecting** - paraphrasing with the addition of an interpretation of the emotions/feelings being communicated both verbally and non-verbally
  - **Clarify** - paraphrasing for the purpose of informing the speaker that you want to make sure you know the content of the communication
  
- When is your listening capacity most hampered?

### 4. Directing - the skill of clearly stating what the patient needs to do.

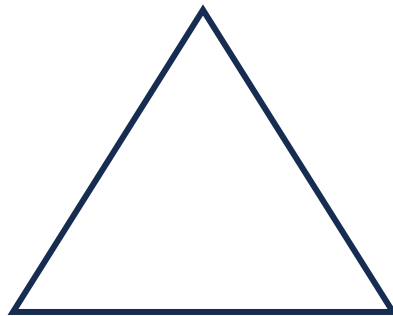
- In what circumstances do you use directing as your primary focus of communication?
  
- When does directing work most effectively?
  
- What do you do when patients are inattentive to your direct communication?

## 5. Informing - the skill of educating and instructing.

- Priming the brain (prefrontal cortex) to take in information.
  - Asking the Permission Question

## 6. Guiding - the skill of showing the patient the path to benefit from 21<sup>st</sup>-century dentistry.

- I-based communication
  - I think . . .
  - I wonder about . . .
  - I am interested in knowing more about . . .
- Curiosity
  - Tell me more about . . . .
  - What are your thoughts about . . .
  - I am thinking .... what are your thoughts about that?
  - What do you want to be different?
  - I think this is what you mean . . . Am I accurate?
  - I think that you are . . . Are you?
  - Please tell me more about what .....means so I am sure I understand.
- Triad of Effective Communication



- I want to discuss . . . . And get your thoughts about it.
- I am thinking that . . .
- Let me tell you what I see and think, then I'd like to hear your thoughts.
- I'd be interested in your thoughts about . . . . .
- When I see . . . that is what I think . . . Do you have any thoughts about what I am seeing?