

Verbal Communication

Positive	Negative
Good level of tone	Shouting/Whispering
Speaking in a clear voice	Mumbling
Speaking at a steady and appropriate pace	Speaking too quickly or too slowly
Facing the person you are speaking to	Looking down /away from the person you are speaking to
Uncovered mouth	Mouth covered with hand or mask
Clean Teeth / Sweet breath	Plaque covered, stained teeth Halitosis (alcohol, garlic)
Allowing time for response	Not allowing time for a response
Interrupting the other person only when absolutely necessary	Always interrupting the other person
Not finishing off the other person's sentences	always finishing off the other person's sentences

Non-verbal communication

Positive	Negative
Appropriate eye contact (but not for long periods)	Looking anywhere but at the person – especially at your watch or the clock behind the person's head
Body in a relaxed 'open' pose	A rigid body pose with folded arms, or a far too relaxed body pose that may be interpreted in an over friendly or sexual way. Fidgeting
Try to position yourself at the same height to the person you are speaking to	Standing above the person or sitting behind a desk and making them stand
Keeping an appropriate distance or personal space between you and the person you are communicating with	Encroaching on an individual's 'personal' space or positioning yourself at a great distance
An interested expression	A bored expression accompanied by yawning. If you really have to yawn, cover your mouth and apologise
Smile occasionally	Never smile
Occasional nodding with head slightly to one side	Rigid, upright head, with no nodding
Not eating or chewing gum	Eating and chewing gum
Total attention to person	Having conversations with other people. Allowing interruptions

Dealing with anxiety in the dental environment

There are often simple steps that can be taken to help anxious patients when they visit the dental clinic. Reduce the waiting time for the patient and try and create a pleasant friendly dental environment. Have interesting visual distractions such as up to date magazines in good condition. Keep to the appointment time if possible and have delays explained to the patient.

Introduce yourself to the patient if it is the first time you have met, and use the patient's name more than once during the treatment (check what they would like to be called).

Ask the patient about themselves (e.g what have they been doing, children, holidays, etc.), and try to avoid talking about yourself too much or talking to a colleague on personal or social issues whilst ignoring the patient. Show the patient you are listening/understanding by verbal and positive non-verbal communication.

Allow enough time for the patient to get comfortable in the chair before putting it back, tying on bibs, putting on glasses and turning on lights.

Reassure honestly, use touch appropriately and do not 'make up' answers. If you do not know how to respond to the patient's question, ask someone who is in a position to know the answer.

Keep the patient informed on how systems operate in the surgery or clinic (appointments, payments, opening hours, emergency services, etc.).

Most importantly, however busy or stressed you feel, do not take it out on the patient or other colleagues in the presence of a patient. Also remember to smile, it can reassure a patient and make you feel better!

Visual disability

Appropriate gentle touching and tone of voice are important

Speak to the visually impaired person not the accompanying person

Do not grab them and lead them into the surgery, let them rest their hand on your arm

Allow them to touch and use all recommended oral hygiene aids

An electric toothbrush may be helpful

Do not shout at them

Always inform them of what procedures are about to take place

Do not suddenly come up behind them

Hearing Disability

Always look at the person

Speak slowly, form words carefully and do not mumble

There is no need to shout

Provide pen and paper if necessary

Avoid high pitched background noise when talking as this affects hearing aids

Use a gentle touch on the shoulder when you want to attract the patient's attention if they are turned away from you

Do not suddenly come up behind them

They may have a side which has better hearing, remember this if the patient informs you

When meeting a disabled person:

Only offer help if it seems appropriate. Always wait until your offer is accepted before you do anything; listen to what the person says.

Only use a disabled person's first name if you are also using other people's first names.

Treat a disabled person with the same respect you would give to anyone else.

Do not lean on someone's wheelchair: it is his or her personal space.

Communicate directly with the disabled person, not to their companion or interpreter.

Only make the same physical contact as you would make with anyone else; do not help someone to get up or sit down without first offering to help and listening to their reply.

When meeting people with impaired vision

Introduce yourself and others clearly; say where people are in the room

A guide dog is a working dog and should not be treated as a pet.

If the person seems to need help, ask 'may I offer you an arm'; that way, you can guide rather than seeming to propel the person.

When you are offering a handshake say 'shall we shake hands?'

When you are offering a seat, guide the person's hand to the back or the arm of the seat, and say what you are going to do.

Tell the person if you are going to move away, so they are not left talking to an empty space.

When meeting people who are deaf

There are different degrees and types of deafness, and different ways for deaf people or those who are hard of hearing to communicate.

Ask the person to tell you how they prefer to communicate, and to help you to find interpreters or other support in advance.

If there is a sign language interpreter, speak to the individual not the interpreter.

Look directly to the person you are speaking to; stop talking if you have to turn away.

Speak clearly in normal speech rhythm and a little more slowly.

Do not use exaggerated gestures.

Make sure you are visible in a good light

When meeting people who are deaf-blind

Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and sight impairments, but deaf-blind people are not always completely deaf or blind in fact, most deaf-blind people do have some residual hearing or sight, or both. So, the advice provided in the sections on people with impaired vision or hearing may also apply. In addition:

Let the person know you are there: approach from the front and touch them lightly on the arm or shoulder to attract their attention.

Many deaf-blind people need to be guided. Different people like to be guided in different ways: some deaf-blind people experience poor balance

Do not grab or propel or pull a person – let them know you are offering to escort them by guiding their hand to your elbow.

Communication methods used by deaf-blind people can include the following:- lip reading, writing notes, sign language, which a specially skilled interpreter might adapt for the person;- block alphabet: this is where you use your forefinger to write words on the palm of the deaf-blind persons hand – use the whole palm and write in clear capital letters.

When meeting people who use a wheelchair or crutches

If you are talking for more than a few moments to someone in a wheelchair, try to position yourself so that you are at the same level, or at least ask the person if they would like you to sit down.

If there is a high desk or counter, move to the front.

Do not tidy away someone else's crutches when they sit down.

If you know it is not easy to move around your building in a wheelchair, offer to help: heavy doors or deep pile carpets are just some of the hazards to watch for.

Do not assume that ramps solve everything – they may be too steep or slippery.

When meeting people with speech difficulties

Pay attention to a person with speech difficulties; be patient and be encouraging do not try and finish sentences.

Slowness or impaired speech has nothing to do with someone's intelligence

If you need information break down your questions to deal with individual points

Do not pretend to understand if you have not

Patients with facial disfigurement

If you are surprised by someone's appearance or feel uncomfortable try not to show it

Make eye contact as you would with anyone else, try not to stare

Listen carefully and do not let the person's appearance distract you.

Never ask 'what happened to you?' restrain your curiosity.