

Providing Structure

A leaflet for healthcare staff



Making conversations easier

Providing Structure

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1. Make organisation overt

2. Attend to flow



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Providing Structure

1. Make organisation overt

Providing structure is about explaining to the patient what is going on in the consultation and sharing our thinking. We are very familiar with what happens in consultations but organising the consultation in this way is very helpful for patients because they are not familiar with consultations and are also worried and concerned.

Communication skills

- Agree the agenda
- Summarise and recall
- Signpost
- Apply a logical structure
- Keep to time



Providing Structure

1. Make organisation overt

Agree the agenda

Agreeing the agenda for your consultation helps you and the patient/family negotiate their way through it and understand and process the information.

First I would like to find out how you are feeling today, what your main concerns are and then I would like to talk about the treatment. So... how are you feeling?



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1. Make organisation overt

Summarise and recall

Summarise and recall throughout to check understanding:

So just to check if I have understood you correctly... your appetite has not been the same and you have been losing weight?

Signpost

Transitional statements allow you to signal a change in direction, and move from one section of the consultation to the next.

What I would like to do now is go over your story in a little more detail and then ask you some specific questions about...



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2. Attend to flow

Apply a logical structure

Structuring the consultation is important as it helps you to manage your time effectively and ensure that key points are covered.

Now we are going to talk about the treatment options.



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Keep to time

Some clinicians like to make clear the approximate amount of time available for the consultation; others prefer not to do this. Whatever your approach, it is important to make it clear to the patient and relatives how you are moving through the consultation.

It's time to finish soon, let's come back to this tomorrow...



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2. Attend to flow

TIP

Structuring your consultations is important to ensure that you manage your time effectively and that key points are covered. Bear in mind that while every consultation requires some structure, each one will be different and requires a flexible approach to ensure that all important information is considered and that the patient feels a true partner in discussions about their own health and well-being.

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This Skills Card is the work of the National Healthcare Communication Programme.

