

Communicating with Teens *Top Tips*

ENVIRONMENT



Try to find a calm space – low noise levels & lighting (this can be tricky in a hospital). Where possible, make time for one-on-one interactions. Talk while doing something (e.g. tidying up) to reduce pressure & give thinking time. Give gentle guidance - create as much choice as you can within the boundaries of what the desired change is eg "have your meds now or in half an hour".

Listen with your eyes as well as your ears – notice what their body language tells you. Stay calm, be self-aware – use a steady tone, relaxed posture & facial expression. Communicate that you are a safe person to talk to. Aim for open, relaxed, & non-threatening stance. Respect personal space – they'll feel safer if you maintain a comfortable distance.



AGE & STAGE



Consider their developmental stage rather than their age. Gauge how far ahead they can think. Focus on one step at a time with conversations on the near future rather than long-term plans. Notice when thinking shifts from concrete (facts) to more abstract (concepts and imagination). Avoid offering too many choices until they can comfortably hold more than one idea at a time.

Use reflective listening and let them express frustration: Summarise what you heard "I'm just checking I think you said". Use clear communication: Simple, concrete language, repeat key messages. Use humour: Can be great to distract and defuse tension. Humour that's self-deprecating works well. Lean on rapport: Build trust with light, positive exchanges before handling serious topics.



THOUGHTFUL WORDS



Validate emotions: "It's very reasonable to feel like that"
Ask supportive questions: "Do you want to tell me about it?"
Offer reassurance: "When you're ready, we can..."
Choices offer control: "Would you like to stop or keep going?"
Avoid arguments: Young people can't reason when they're distressed. Focus on calming first.

