How to Discuss Obesity With Your Patients in a Clinical Setting

Effective Communication Strategies



Existing weight bias and stigma can make discussions about weight management a sensitive topic for patients.[1-4] Consider approaching these conversations using the following techniques to connect and communicate with patients:

Three Helpful Techniques to Connect and Communicate With Patients

Identify Source of Motivation[4-9]

Guide patients to discover and reinforce their personal source of motivation to optimize treatment

Build Trust Through Empathy[4,9-11]

Use the 3 steps:
- Listen
- Validate
- Engage

Set Personalized Goals[4-6,8,11,12]

- Define individual measures of success
- SEEK ➠ PROBE ➠ REPEAT ➠ RECORD

Identify Source of Motivation: "ASK" Framework

Effective lifestyle counseling begins with helping the patient identify their own unique source of motivation. A simple framework named "ASK" can help the clinician identify and confirm the patient's source of motivation.[6,7]



Acknowledge that only the patient can identify their most meaningful sources of motivation[4,8]

Use "ASK"

Acknowledgement

Storytelling

Knowledge



The patient's **Storytelling** of their personal experiences holds the key to their motivation[9]

Use the **Knowledge** gained about the patient's source of motivation to guide future counseling[8]

Build Trust Through Empathy

Communicating with empathy is critical for patients with obesity as it helps build trust, reduces feelings of stigma, and encourages open and honest communication.[4,10]



Listen	**I hear you**	Clinician is **attentive** to the words and gestures of the patient
Validate	**I recognize and accept your feelings**	Clinician **recognizes the opinion** of the patient
Engage	**I want to help**	Clinician **engages** with the patient and communicates their desire to support them



Set Personalized Goals[4-6,8,11,12]

Define individual measures of success | Use the following process to help create meaningful goals with patients

SEEK
To learn more about the patient's goals

PROBE
With clarifying questions

REPEAT
Words or expressions heard back to the patient

RECORD
In the chart for future exchanges

Applying Strategic Communication Techniques in Clinical Practice

Consider the following questions to gain a deeper understanding of the patients' source of motivation.[6,7,11]

How ready do you feel to make lifestyle changes?

What do you want to achieve?



What challenges do you currently face because of your health?

What are the benefits you expect to see from making lifestyle changes?

Here are some examples of how to show empathy and provide reassurance to the patient.[4,8,10,11,13]

Acknowledge their feelings
I'm sorry you are going through this.

Show gratitude that the patient opened up
This must be hard to talk about. Thanks for opening up to me.

Show interest
How are you feeling about everything?

Be encouraging
Dealing with a disease like obesity can be challenging and have ups and downs.

Be supportive
Know you are not alone. Many struggle with the changes this journey brings.

Let's meet Sandra, who follows up with Dr. Johnson to discuss the progress and updates on her lifestyle plan (hypothetical case study).

SEEK | PROBE

Dr. Johnson uses the SEEK and PROBE steps[4-6] in his conversation with Sandra.



Hi, Sandra. Last time we spoke, you mentioned your interest in incorporating more salads into your workday. How's your progress been with that?

You know, I am trying my best, but I'm only able to do so 2 to 3 times a week. I find other foods too tempting, or I don't have enough time to eat properly.



In addition to SEEK and PROBE, the steps REPEAT and RECORD are also essential in setting personalized goals. These steps ensure that the patient's goals are clearly documented and revisited in future consultations.

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Scan to explore additional resources, including communication tools, tips, and best practices, for conversations in obesity care.

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