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Communicating with Children

Soft-skills in communicating with children: Empathy

Empathy is the ability to transpose yourself in the shows of another person. It represents the ability to understand the way he thinks, feels and acts.

It must not be confounded with pity or compassion towards a person in difficulty.

Empathy means 'to stay beside' the person, an attitude that facilitates the expression of emotions, convictions, values and improves the doctor-patient communication.

Suggestions:

- Use as little as possible the closed questions that hinder communication: 'Why did you do...?',
- Use open questions that facilitate communication: 'Could you tell me more about...?',
- Listen to the interlocutor,
- Avoid moralization: 'It is not good what you did.',
- Avoid interruptions during the conversation: 'My opinion is that...',
- Avoid labeling: 'You are a bit careless...',
- Avoid negative feedback: 'Your results are unsatisfying...',
- Use constructive suggestions: 'Next time will be better if you will...'.

An empathetic response is especially important when strong negative emotions such as anger, fear or sadness are involved. An empathetic response will help the patient or parent reveal feelings and concerns. Here is an example of an empathetic response: "It's hard to even imagine how difficult that must have been for you. Can you tell me how you felt when that happened?"



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