

Communication while wearing PPE

Compassionate communication can positively influence how parents and families experience their care even when the worst happens. Good communication builds trust between a health care professional and an individual, enabling parents and families to feel safe and confident in the care they are experiencing.

Warm facial expressions and a clear gentle voice are both qualities of compassionate communication, so PPE and particularly facemasks are a barrier to building a trusting relationship with parents and families. Parents and professionals have told us about the difficulties caused. Good communication can't take away the pain parents and families feel but it can reduce the impact of trauma, both in the short and long term.

However, there are several things that health care professionals can do to maintain compassionate communication even when wearing PPE

“Once admitted to hospital all staff were in full PPE, care was second to none, but it did make difficult conversations hard as you could not see or speak to staff properly” Bereaved parent



Carry a photograph of yourself without a mask and share when appropriate, or display staff photographs in a public area.



Introduce yourself clearly, have your name badge visible and gesture to it as you make your introductions.



Acknowledge the difficulties, explain why you can't shake hands or make physical contact and that the situation is difficult.



Use eye contact and smile, even if they can't see your mouth, people will be able to see a smile in your eyes.



Consider your tone of voice, ensure you can be heard, but be gentle, kind and honest.



Support understanding, by using hand gestures.



Take your time, don't talk too fast, check back for understanding, use written prompts if necessary.



Say things in a different way, if you have not been understood.



Think about the physical environment, face parents, try to stand still when speaking, try not to stand with light or a window behind you.

For more information on sensitive and effective communication visit sands.org.uk/sensitivecommunication

Our helpline provides practical advice and emotional support to health care professionals,

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