



Speaking to Patients with Confidence

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Thank you for your participation.

Introduction

When patients and clients come into your care, they're vulnerable to some degree. They're looking to health care providers for guidance and reassurance. Your communication sets the tone for their expectations. The more confidently you speak, the more confidence you instill in those you work with and serve. Confidence starts with your internal dialogue and is conveyed through subtle cues like body language and vocal delivery. Even those who describe themselves as "shy" can still adopt more confident behavior that allows patients to trust the care they're receiving.

Educational Objectives

After taking this course, participants will learn how to:

1. Identify the communication behaviors that comprise a confident demeanor.
2. Change passive internal self-talk to realistic, confident self-talk.
3. Transform shyness into more assertive, confident behavior patterns.

Let's Get Started!

Start On the Inside

Showing confidence on the outside starts with being confident on the inside. After all, your external communication is an extension of your internal thoughts and beliefs. You can try and fake being confident on the outside for a short while, but eventually, the truth will be revealed. Confidence is more than thinking optimistically – it's thinking realistically. Some people over-estimate their skills, but a great majority of people under-estimate their abilities. If you have low self-confidence, there's a good chance you're judging yourself far too harshly or you've set unreasonable expectations.

They may sound similar, but self-esteem and self-confidence are different. Having a high self-esteem means holding a realistic, appreciative opinion of yourself. Self-confidence refers to beliefs about your abilities. It's the belief that you can do something well, or succeed eventually given enough time, practice, and effort. Note that the definition doesn't include a timeline! In other words, being self-confident doesn't mean that you are supposed to do everything right the first time without ever failing or making mistakes. Self-confidence is the result of feeling competent. The only way to feel competent is by practicing skills enough times that you know you can recover from mistakes. In terms of communication, you need to be willing to make a few mistakes on the road to improving.

Realistic Thinking

Self-confident people are realistic about their skills. They don't puff themselves up with false pride nor do they cut themselves down. They also don't strive for perfection (which is unrealistic), but

instead focus on effort. Here are some examples of low-confidence thoughts transformed into more realistic, honest statements:

- Change: “I can’t do anything right,” to “I can do some things better than others.”
- Change: “Everyone thinks I’m stupid,” to “People can see how hard I work.”
- Change: “I’ll never be able to do this right,” to “The harder I work, the more I can improve.”
- Change: “I don’t want to make a mistake,” to “Everyone makes mistakes, that’s how you learn.”
- Change: “Everyone else can already do this,” to “Even though some people may have had a head start on practicing their skills, I can achieve the same proficiency eventually.”

By changing your thinking, you’ll change your delivery. Recognize your strengths and accept that you can improve your skills with effort applied over time. Great communicators make plenty of mistakes! But, they also understand that’s part of the process so they learn the lesson and do better next time.

Quiet Confidence

Confident people are often thought to be extroverts, highly sociable, and unreserved. However, that’s just one form of confidence. It’s possible to possess a quiet, less gregarious type of confidence found in people who are more introverted (think Bill Gates). According to Susan Cain, author of, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking*, shyness and introversion are not the same thing. Shyness is the fear of negative judgment, and introversion is a preference for quiet, minimally stimulating environments.

Quiet people are no less confident, but in a world that tends to value teamwork, public speaking, and sharing opinions, introverts can be misunderstood. Sometimes a person demonstrates introversion because of his shyness, but the difference is that shy people yearn to be more sociable, while introverts prefer more alone time. So, a shy person feels sad and lonely being alone, while an introvert feels happy and content.

Are You an Introvert?

Susan Cain’s research suggests one third of the population identify themselves as introverts. Are you one of them? Answer these statements yes or no to determine your preference:

- I prefer listening over speaking.
- I prefer working alone than in teams.
- I prefer dinner with one person rather than attending a large party.
- I prefer reading a book more than socializing.
- I prefer thinking about what I want to say rather than giving an immediate opinion.
- I feel energized by alone time and drained when around people for too long.
- Solitude spurs my creativity better than brainstorming with others.

If you answered “yes” to most of these statements, you’re an introvert. Being an introvert or extrovert shouldn’t be viewed as an absolute, but more of a continuum. Also, one style is not better than the other, but there are situations that call for certain skills. What’s important for you to recognize are the situations in which you feel most comfortable speaking up and how others view your quietness.

Correcting Misperceptions

Quietness can be incorrectly interpreted to mean a lack of confidence, aloofness, anger, or arrogance. If you’ve ever experienced any of these misunderstandings, it’s up to you to let people know your preferred communication style and that even if you contribute less frequently, when you do, it really means something.

You’ll also need to assess when an introverted style may be hurting your personal or professional relationships. There will be situations where people really need to hear from you and silence or a delayed response sends the message that you don’t care. Pay attention to the needs of others, prep yourself for deep engagement, and then schedule time alone to recharge. With planning, you can maintain important relationships and still honor your personal preferences.

Conquer Shyness

Shyness is the tendency to feel awkward, worried or tense during social encounters, especially with unfamiliar people. You may have physical symptoms like blushing, sweating, a pounding heart or upset stomach, negative feelings about yourself, worries about how others view you, and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions. Unlike introverts who feel energized by time alone, shy people often desperately want to connect with others, but don’t know how or can’t tolerate the anxiety.

If you suffer from shyness, there are many steps you can take to reduce your anxiety. Communicating with others may always be a bit uncomfortable, but doesn’t have to be debilitating. Don’t wait to learn skills until you feel comfortable otherwise you’ll procrastinate forever. Instead, you must tolerate feeling uncomfortable while you practice to eventually feel more confident.

Six Steps to Overcome Shyness

To make any change, the most important thing is to *start*. Set small goals with the understanding that you’ll feel uncomfortable at first and might even make a few mistakes. That’s okay! Practice is the goal, not perfection. Here are six ways to start conquering shyness:

- *Stop labeling.* When you describe yourself as shy, you’re setting expectations for yourself and others. Drop the shy label. Tell yourself the truth: you’re practicing your social skills and improving communication. It’s a lot more positive.

- *Observe.* Watch how other people communicate and copy them. What body language do they use? What do they talk about? How do they balance listening with speaking? You don't have to strive to become a social butterfly, just fit in.
- *Face your fears.* The only way to reduce anxiety is to experience it, not avoid it. Each day, you must consciously engage in social interaction. The more you do it, the easier it will become.
- *Prepare topics.* Always have at least five things you can talk about, whether it's personal experiences, something work-related, or pop culture. That way you'll never get caught off-guard.
- *Focus on others.* Social anxiety increases when your thoughts turn inward and you start to worry how you're coming across. Stay focused on the other person, pay attention to what he's saying, and ask questions to show interest. By getting involved in the conversation, you'll soon forget to be scared.
- *Change irrational thoughts.* You may feel everyone is judging you, but truthfully, people aren't thinking about you as much as you imagine! Any attention you receive is momentary and fleeting. No one is keeping a scorecard, so you shouldn't either.

Unspoken Messages

Imagine being lost in a big store and needing directions. You quickly survey the people standing around and choose someone to ask for help. What made you choose that person? Did he appear friendly? Knowledgeable? Confident? How did you know? Before you ever speak a word, you've communicated nonverbally through your body language. Nonverbal signals include posture, facial expressions, eye contact, hand gestures, arm position, gait, shoulder shrugging, ticks, grunts or sighs (as they are not actual words), foot and leg movement, and physical distance between you and another person. Amazingly, within seconds, you're able to notice someone and size up an opinion about him.

That's not to say all body language interpretations are correct because some people just aren't aware they're sending mixed signals. A person may say, "I'm happy to meet you," while grimacing which would seem to suggest the opposite. But, perhaps that's the face he makes when concentrating on remembering a new name. Either way, when your words and actions don't match, people will always believe the nonverbal message. They'll also question your trustworthiness if you're saying one thing, but showing another.

Take a Stand

A confident nonverbal message starts with good posture. Whether sitting or standing your shoulders should be in line with your hipbones. (Try it right now. Did you grow a little taller?) Stand with your feet lined up under your hipbones and weight evenly distributed between both feet (versus "sitting" back in one hip). Keep your arms loosely hanging at your sides. Drop your shoulders and elongate your neck. Be careful not to confuse standing up straight as being stiff. Taut muscles and facial expressions communicate that you're tense and on guard. It's possible

to have straight posture with relaxed muscles. If good posture is something you struggle with, taking a basic yoga class can be very beneficial.

Many people find this basic stance too exposed and would rather hide themselves by crossing their legs, folding arms, shoving their hands in pockets, or playing with their phone. These are examples of rejecting behaviors indicating that you don't want to be approached. Of course, when in conversation, your arms and hands will naturally move and not always rest at your side. As long as your motions are fluid and support your message, people will feel comfortable around you. Jerky motions, pointing in someone's face, or slapping the table for emphasis is off-putting. The goal is to come across as open and accessible versus closed off and unapproachable.

The Eyes Have It

One of the most powerful nonverbal signals is eye contact. If you isolated a picture of only a person's eyes, you probably could accurately assess his current mood. Eye contact is used to determine friendliness, caution, confidence, nervousness, surprise, excitement, confusion, flirting, fear, anger, and honesty. But, interpretation of these messages is largely dependent on culture. In the United States, eye contact is used to show interest, high self-esteem, and respect. But in some Asian and Native American cultures for example, using direct eye contact with an authority figure is considered disrespectful.

What Are You Looking At?

If you're using eye contact to show confidence, remember that more is not necessarily better! Staring is hardly a friendly gesture. It feels more comfortable to break eye contact after about three seconds by blinking, or briefly shifting your focus than to lock into an uninterrupted gaze. It's tempting to break eye contact by glancing at your phone, but this sends a disrespectful message. For many people, constantly checking their phone has become an unconscious habit. When in conversation with others, put your phone away. The most confident (and respectful) message you can send is to be fully present with another person without relying on a built-in distraction.

Eyes that Light Up

Positive descriptions of eye contact include friendly, warm, and inviting. All of these are the result of another facial expression: smiling. When you smile, it shows in your eyes, or to be more accurate in the tiny laugh lines surrounding your eyes. That's how you can tell a fake, polite smile from one that's truly genuine. Anyone can fake a big, broad smile, but unless it's real, they can't manufacture the way muscles surrounding the eyes respond.

Dr. Paul Eckman is an expert in decoding the emotions behind facial expressions and developed the Facial Action Coding System to help scientists distinguish between genuine and fake smiles. According to Eckman, "The only place that will reveal the difference in a broad intense smile is the skin between the eyebrows and the upper eyelid. That will move slightly down in the genuine smile and will not move in the social or false smile." You don't have to be an expert

to sense the difference. Even if you can't pinpoint the exact reason you don't find someone authentic, there will be some hesitancy in fully trusting and paying attention to him. The next time you look someone in the eyes and smile, make sure it's genuine. Otherwise, he may not believe a word you have to say.

Make a Sound Impression

Here's a challenge for you: if ten strangers listened to your current voicemail message, how would they rank you on confidence? How do you think they would describe your personality based on your voice alone? The same type of snap judgment is made everyday when people do business by phone. Making the most of your natural voice and using it properly is important to a confident delivery, whether talking in person or by phone.

Vocal chords are like stringed instruments. When tightened, the pitch goes up and when relaxed, the pitch goes down. Pitch variety is more interesting to the ear, and lower pitched voices are perceived as having more confidence and authority. You don't have to fake a low voice though, just use your full natural range. If your body is tense, your voice tends to stay in the upper register, sounding literally, "uptight." Relaxing your muscles will allow you to access a full range of at least eight notes. Relaxed muscles, however, doesn't equal slouching! In order to use your instrument properly, you must sit and stand upright, without rigidity.

Relax and Breathe

Actors and singers are able to project strong voices by learning to breathe deeply using their diaphragm versus shallow, upper chest breathing. The difference in tone is one that's full and strong versus thin and wispy. Here's how to practice: sit tall in a chair with your feet flat on the ground. Place your hands lightly on your lower belly. Inhale through your nose filling your diaphragm so that your belly pushes out your hands. (Your shoulders and chest should not move.) Exhale fully through your mouth like blowing out a candle. Repeat this four times. You can increase your strength by holding your inhaled breath two counts before exhaling. This should help you be able to sustain a conversation without losing energy at the end of sentences.

Vocal Delivery

Choosing the right words to convey your message is certainly important, but how you say them will dominate the meaning of your message. The same way your body language is more believable than what you say, the *way* you say something is more important than what you said. Take the simple phrase, "I'm sorry." Depending on how it's delivered, the same words could feel either sincere or sarcastic. Your delivery makes all the difference.

Vocal delivery consists of four elements: pitch, volume, rate and pauses.

Vocal Variety

If you think of your favorite genre of music, it probably doesn't rely on just a few notes played at the same volume. It has highs and lows, and moments of intensity mixed with more quiet sections. That's what keeps it interesting. Your voice is your musical instrument and it needs to offer the same variety in pitch and volume in order to maintain interest.

Pitch range should vary at least three notes below and above your normal speaking voice to emphasize certain points. Avoid speaking in a monotone voice, which is saying everything in the same pitch. Nothing could be more boring! Also be aware of using "uptalk," which is ending statements in an upward pitch, as if you're asking a question. So, instead of saying, "I'd like to offer an idea," it would sound like, "I'd like to offer an idea?" The underlying message of uptalk is that you're not sure of what you're saying and need approval.

Monitor your volume by noticing how people react when listening to you. If they're leaning in and constantly asking you to repeat yourself, speak up. And, if they wince, back up, or look around to see who else can hear you, it means you're too loud. The right volume allows everyone to hear you comfortably, but not so loud that you attract unwanted attention.

Find Your Rhythm

Your rate of speech also impacts how long people will listen to you. Speak too fast, and others will have a hard time following you. Plus, it gives people the impression that either you're nervous, or you're trying to get something past them. But, speaking too slowly will lose an audience out of boredom. If people finish your sentences or encourage you to get to the point, it's a sure sign that you need to pick up the pace. A reasonable speaking rate is about 150 words per minute.

Pausing is communication's form of punctuation. Just like reading a run-on sentence without any punctuation or spacing would be confusing, so is non-stop talking. Silence draws people in because it takes confidence to pause, make eye contact, and then continue. Pauses are the periods, commas, and white space on a written page. They should replace fillers such as, "you know," "um," and "like." These words take up space but add nothing.

Smile Sincerely

A smile can speak volumes, but exactly what it says about you depends on several factors. A genuine smile communicates happiness, friendliness, and confidence. But, people also smile to convey fear, contempt, and flirtation. A smile's meaning also depends on cultural standards. In general, Americans smile to show goodwill while Northern Europeans tend to smile with much less frequency. Depending on your viewpoint, Europeans can appear unfriendly while Americans look goofy. In contrast, Asians tend to smile with greater frequency than Americans, which may seem inappropriate in some situations.

The key is to make your smile genuine. It's natural to make eye contact and smile when greeting someone, but it can seem disingenuous to continue to have a smile plastered on your face

throughout a conversation, especially if what you're discussing isn't all that pleasant. Use a sincere smile to put others at ease, and then respond appropriately to the emotion of the conversation.

Mind Your Distance

Personal space is the distance two people keep between themselves in order to feel comfortable. If the amount of space is too great, the person approaching you will seem cold, shy, or unfriendly. If the amount of space is too small, the person approaching will seem aggressive, rude, or intrusive. Yet, a number of factors influence the appropriate personal space to keep.

For instance, two women tend to stand closer together than two men. More room tends to be given to those of higher status, like a boss or political figure. You tend to stand closer to those you know well, versus strangers, except when space forces intimacy, like on a crowded elevator or train. In those situations, you may stand very close to someone who you wouldn't normally if you were in a spacious setting. Cultural standards and environments value personal space differently. For example, Latin Americans tend to stand much closer than other cultures. People from crowded spaces like New York City or India also tolerate closer circles than those who are used to more room. In general, a distance of about three feet between you and another person is safe without appearing too distant or too intimate.

Lean In

While the appropriate amount of personal space may differ, leaning in to show interest is universal. Watch the host of any TV talk show and you'll see him lean in toward a guest when he's particularly interested, entertained, or friendly with the person. Compare that image with a classroom full of bored teenagers leaning back in their chairs, legs stretched out, and arms closed to show disinterest. (Sleeping on the desk also shows disinterest and doesn't count as "leaning in"!)

Observe the body language at your next meeting. Who's leaning in, appearing alert and interested versus leaning back showing a lack of enthusiasm? Leaning in also signifies confidence because there's more of a chance you'll be noticed. The speaker will probably make eye contact with you and might ask for your opinion. You're showing you're not afraid to engage and participate. Even if you are afraid, practice leaning in anyway! Remember, the only way to conquer a fear is to move through it, not around it.

Listen and Loop

Some people confuse confidence with always having something to say. Not true! You want to make sure what you have to say has value. The best way to ensure that is to listen to what others share first, and then loop their comments back into your conversation. You become instantly memorable because you're validating the other person by paying attention. There's no greater show of respect.

Listening is more than waiting for someone to stop talking so you can start. It's the belief that what he has to say is just important as what you have to say. Therefore, active listening requires intent, energy, and focus. You're listening for relatable nuggets of information that you can weave into your comments to create a connection. Good listeners pay attention to the full message being communicated including verbal, vocal, and visual cues. They also show they're listening by offering appropriate encouragers such as eye contact, nodding, and saying, "Hmm-mm."

Of course it's easy to listen to people with whom you agree. It's much tougher when you don't like what they're saying, or worse, when you don't like the person. But, remember, just because you listen to someone doesn't mean you agree. If you're hoping for an open ear when it's your turn to speak, then you must extend the same courtesy. Seek to understand before you respond. Let the person speak and feel completely heard before you start correcting or arguing a different side. You might even ask a few questions to explore his views before you speak. If you listen well, the other person will feel understood, even if you share a different opinion.

In Conclusion

Patients and clients are seeking care from health professionals who are trustworthy and competent. A confident communication style sets the tone for their expectations and future compliance. You are always communicating – from the way you speak to yourself to the body language you reveal to others. By paying attention to the subtle cues of your non-verbal messages, you can be assured you're sending a confident message that in turn helps those you serve feel confident in your knowledge and skills.

TEST

Speaking to Patients with Confidence

Complete the test below and follow the instructions provided on page 1 to receive your certificate. Remember to include the Payment Method form when you mail the test in. Please complete the information below to serve as the sign in form. Please PRINT clearly.

Name: _____

Phone: () _____

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Circle the correct answer:

1. Self-confident people perceive themselves:
 - a) As better than everyone else.
 - b) With a distorted ego.
 - c) Realistically, by acknowledging strengths and weaknesses.

2. Introverted personalities:
 - a) Prefer quiet, minimally stimulating environments.
 - b) Dislike people.
 - c) Can never be confident.

3. You can tell a smile is sincere when:
 - a) The person smiles all the time during every conversation.
 - b) The muscles around the eyes move.
 - c) The person looks at you while smiling.

4. A description of confident posture is:
 - a) Standing erect and alert.
 - b) Looking straight ahead with arms to your sides.
 - c) Shoulders aligned over your hipbones with arms hanging loosely.

5. Speaking with “uptalk” instills confidence in others.
 - a) T
 - b) F

I read and completed the test questions for 1 hour of credit.

Signature _____ Date _____

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