

Keeping Conversations Woman-centred: Key Tips

1. Agree an agenda

The conversation should be a two-way partnership to ensure it remains mother-centred. Find out what she wants to talk about and address her needs first. She will then be more open to what you have to say

2. Ask open questions

This will help you to explore feelings and emotions and will provide a clearer outline to her story and previous experience. Use phrases like 'tell me about' and 'how do you feel about' to help encourage her to talk

3. Listen actively

Making eye contact, smiling and nodding all help to show you are listening and will encourage more discussion

4. Reflect back

This shows you have heard what was said and helps clarify any misunderstandings. You can say things like 'you feel that breastfeeding isn't for you because..' or 'you are anxious that...'



5. Find out and build on information she knows

Don't overload with facts and figures. Try to tailor the information to individual needs and expand on what she already knows. It is neither useful nor effective to list all the health benefits of breastfeeding if she has had a previous bad experience, as this will make her feel a failure

6. Show empathy

Remember the importance of walking in the other person's shoes. If she reports a previous bad experience or she says the thought of breastfeeding makes her feel sick, don't dismiss these feelings as they matter to her

7. Remain neutral

Avoid being judgemental, even if you don't agree with what is being said

8. Don't conclude

Sometimes in an effort to be kind, it may be tempting to say things like 'it doesn't matter if you breastfeed or not, your baby will do just as well'. Kindness is important but as a professional, you have a duty of care to provide evidence based information. You can talk about the importance of developing a close and nurturing relationship with her baby but don't patronise her with information that she knows is incorrect.

COMMUNICATION - an overview



Communication is at the heart of effective care and good communication skills are essential for maintaining relationships built on trust.

As a professional, you might feel you have had little opportunity for much recent formal education on communication and, even if you have, there is little harm in reminding ourselves and reinforcing what good practice is.

It is worth noting that most complaints arise from poor or insensitive communication with mothers and their families and working on ways to improve this will have a positive impact across all your care.

Guiding, not directing

Communication is a process used to help us interact and share information, feelings, ideas and concerns with other people. Good communication should be a two way process – an exchange rather than a monopoly of a conversation.

Rollnik et al (2008) describe three main communication styles to demonstrate different approaches used within your profession:

1. **Directing** – when the conversation is led or monopolised by the person telling or prescribing information. There is very little exchange going on. This is often used by healthcare professionals who have limited time.
2. **Following** – when the conversation who is led by the person receiving information. This approach is often used in counselling and is particularly valuable when supporting women who have experienced trauma or loss.
3. **Guiding** – when the conversation is shared between the two parties. This approach involves exploring feelings through active listening and then providing information and alternatives to support informed decision-making. It enables relevant information to be shared and has been effectively to support behavioural change.

