

Time Management: Empathic Interruptions (EEE)

(Larry Mauksch, 2017)

EXCUSE yourself (acknowledge and/or apologize)

EMPATHIZE with the problem that is being cut off

EXPLAIN why you are interrupting

Situations that often occasion empathic interruption:

- Agenda setting
- Finishing an important topic (topic tracking)
- Pausing to explore an important cue

Examples

When attempting to set an agenda and patient dives into history:

- *Excuse me for a moment. Your knee has been painful. Before we talk further about this pain, I'd like to know if you have something else important to address today. This way you and I can figure out how to make the best use of our time.*
- *I apologize for interrupting. Your sleep is a concern but before we talk about it, is there something else important to address during today's visit?*

When patients shift topics or when the patient's speech pattern is repetitive, disorganized, or tangential:

- *Excuse me, your back pain sounds distressing, but we were only part way through addressing your asthma. How about we finish the asthma and then see if there is time for your back pain?*
- *I apologize for interrupting. We decided to talk about your diabetes and it sounds like juggling exercise and diet is hard. I see that you also want to talk about your back pain. I want to make sure that we accomplish something concrete today. Should we stay with your diabetes or shift our focus to back pain and delay dealing with your diabetes?*
- *Forgive me. You are sharing a lot and I can see you are really bothered about _____ [headache, fatigue, allergy, stomach pain] ... and this is frustrating for you. I would like to switch gears and ask several specific questions, then do an exam to make sure we develop a plan that works best for you.*

When a patient "drops" a verbal or nonverbal cue deserving exploration:

(Evidence suggests that investigating a cue is associated with shorter visits)

- *Excuse me, before we continue, you just mentioned something that sounded important. Tell me more about ... [eg, that you do not always feel comfortable at home ... that you do not trust your most recent blood sugar results.]*