

Patient & Family Centred Care: Behind the Mask



Masks have become part of our everyday life. We wear them at work, school, grocery store – everywhere.

With continuous masking at Alberta Health Services, we are having to change how we communicate with patients, families, and each other.

It's not what you say, but how you say it. Animate your tone of voice when possible. A flat, monotone voice gives the impression that the speaker doesn't care about what he or she is saying. Tone is a big part of the overall message received by the listener. Do not speak too quickly, loudly or softly – check if the listener can hear and understand.

Smile with your eyes. Use your eyes and eyebrows to help tell the story. A genuine smile raises the eyebrows and cheeks and comes across “through” the mask. Eye contact is more important than ever before, you may need to get to eye-level when talking with someone. Remember to consider culture when making eye contact.

Words are not enough. Use your body to communicate. Nod your head in agreement, ask the patient for a thumbs up if they understand. You can also supplement non-verbal communication with other forms, such as writing things down for the patient, encourage the patient to take notes or record your comments.