

# The Power of What You Do and Don't Say

The success of a sedation appointment requires more than just administering medication. You are creating an experience during which a patient's psychological needs are met as well. The sensitivity of the sedation team to the patient's emotional state involves using words and phrases that communicate positive images. In the presence of hypnotic medications, hearing encouraging words often leads to a feeling of well-being.

**WHAT DO YOU SAY:** Only say things in the presence of a sedated patient that you want them to remember? Patients will remember what you say, not what they say. Here are some examples:

1. **"I am not going to start work in your mouth until you are completely comfortable."**

*Patients need to hear this. In the back of their minds may lurk painful memories of past emotional trauma suffered during a dental appointment. If they can be reassured that their comfort is your primary concern, then this will go a long way to ensure a successful experience for them and you. A reduction in the patient's level of anxiety can make less medication necessary. With less anxiety in the patient, safety is enhanced.*

2. **"You will have no pain or discomfort during the procedure."**

*While a properly sedated patient is less aware of uncomfortable stimuli, and they often require less local anesthesia, they are still capable of feeling discomfort. Therefore, reassuring an anxious patient that they will not feel discomfort helps them get past the resistance or fear of moving forward with treatment.*

3. **"How are you feeling?"**

*At least every five minutes, the sedation team needs to elicit appropriate verbal responsiveness from the sedated patient. One way to do this is to ask the how they are doing. Their feedback not only establishes verbal responsiveness and reassures the patient they are being heard, but also gives the sedation team valuable information as to the comfort of the patient. If the sedation patient responds less than favorably, then the sedation team should not verbally recognize their discomfort but reassure the patient while taking steps to correct the situation causing the discomfort. They remember what you say, not what they say.*

**4. “Everything is going well.”**

*A sedated, fearful patient may tend to “remember” where they are and act momentarily afraid. A soft and often repeated response reassures them how well the process is going and allows them to relax once again. Do not give any details. For most fearful dental patients, details trigger anxiety.*

**5. “You are an excellent patient!”**

*Unaccustomed to hearing compliments like this, the sedation patient tends to become what they are being praised for. Rewarding behavior is appreciated and often repeated.*

**6. “Are you comfortable?”**

*When a sedated patient asks you a question, especially one that you prefer not to answer, you can ask them a question in response that usually redirects their anxiety. “Are you comfortable?” or “Aren’t you glad that everything is going well?” are good re-directive questions. This can also be used every 5 minutes to check for an appropriate verbal response.*

**7. “We finished the procedure as we had planned.”**

*Sedated patients, not completely aware of the passage of time or the events of the appointment, need to be reassured that the appointment is going well and as planned. Although sometimes the plan must be altered due to unforeseen circumstances, and the patient has given you written permission to make such changes, they react much more favorably to being told that what they anticipated came to pass.*

**8. “You just woke up. You have been sleeping for quite some time.”**

*To a sedated patient, who has been totally comfortable during the appointment and then becomes startled by something, this statement helps them to recognize that they are safe and in good hands. A gentle reminder of their state of sedation helps to reinforce that the process is working. Please recognize that sleep is not appropriate for the visit, but since the depth of anterograde amnesia is profound, the state will feel like sleep to the patient. This statement can help a startled patient to relax again.*

## 9. “Your teeth are looking very beautiful!”

*The sedated patient is hoping for the best possible outcome and has placed their trust in you and your team. Letting your patient know during the appointment that their trust was justified, increases the level of comfort, and makes it more likely they agree that their “teeth look beautiful” after their sedation wears off.*

## 10. “You are an excellent patient!”

See #5 above.

**WHAT DO YOU SAY:** In order to protect your relationship of trust with the patient, it is essential to continue to make positive statements. Here are some examples of statements *not* to say to a sedated patient:

### 1. “You are a difficult patient.”

*Since, “THEY REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAY, NOT WHAT THEY SAY”, if you communicate a patient is uncooperative, they are likely to remain difficult for this appointment and most likely the next. Even if they are not cooperative, you should say, “I am so impressed with how cooperative you are. You are an excellent patient.” This models a positive attitude toward the procedure experience that most likely will improve attitude and result in a better patient now and later.*

### 2. “It’s 11 o’clock.”

*Letting the sedated patient know what time it is often working against one of the greatest benefits of the sedation experience, that of not being aware of the passage of time. If the patient knows they have been there for quite some time, they tend to look, act, and feel fatigue and discomfort.*

### 3. “Your blood pressure seems abnormal.”

*“Doctor, come quick, the blood pressure alarm is going off!” The entire dental team needs to be soft, gentle, easy, and encouraging. Alarming statements in front of the patient can result in more anxiety now and later.*

**4. “You look like you are going to get sick.”**

*Let the patient tell you how they feel. Don't suggest a negative feeling. If a patient looks as if they need to vomit, prepare for that possibility, and simply ask the patient how they feel.*

**5. “This is going to hurt.”**

*While honesty with the patient is critical and maintains the necessary relationship of trust, it is not necessary to announce an injection. Even when you are giving that painful palatal injection, don't tell the patient it will hurt! They remember what you say, not what they say!*



**6. “I'm sorry to hurt you like that.”**

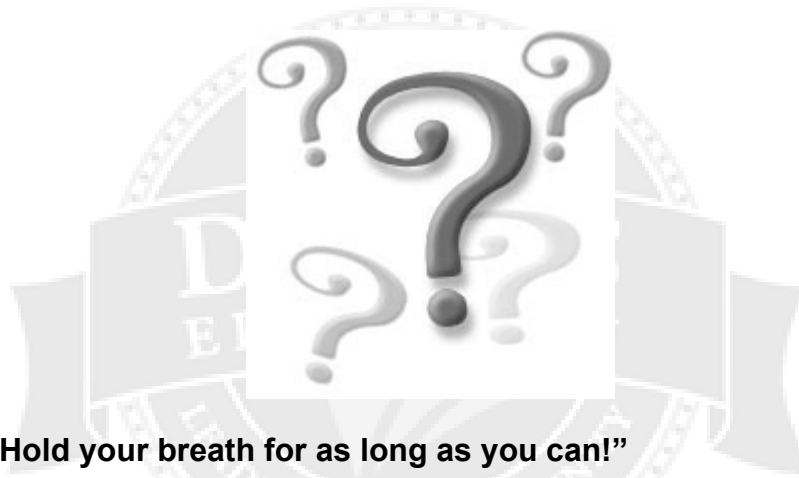
*The same thing applies as in #5 above. Remember, they will remember your words, not theirs. If they ask you why you hurt them? Answer: “You're an excellent patient” and “Your teeth are looking beautiful.”*

**7. “At the next appointment we’ll pull out your teeth.”**

*Even if this is your plan, using these words in this manner does not plant a positive image in the mind of your patient, especially one who is anxious and sedated. Instead, focus the anticipated treatment to the benefits – “At your next appointment, you’ll leave with that beautiful new smile you’ve always wanted.”*

**8. “I am sorry, what was your name again?”**

*What are the sweetest words in any language? Your name is. For some reason, dentists can remember every tooth in a patient’s mouth, but not their name. Please provide your patient with an environment that helps them through this challenging time by using their name often.*



**9. “Hold your breath for as long as you can!”**

*Again, be careful what you ask for! A patient under the influence of a sedative hypnotic medication can be surprisingly compliant with your requests. Obviously, normal and continuous breathing is in the best interests of the patient’s health.*

**10. “Come on! Stay open, so I can do this bite check!”**

*Always be encouraging. You can readily lighten a patient’s level of sedation to get temporary cooperation by stimulating them with a sugar-based drink. Usually, 2 ounces provides 5 – 10 minutes of stimulation for taking an x-ray, getting a bite registration, or a safe visit to the bathroom.*

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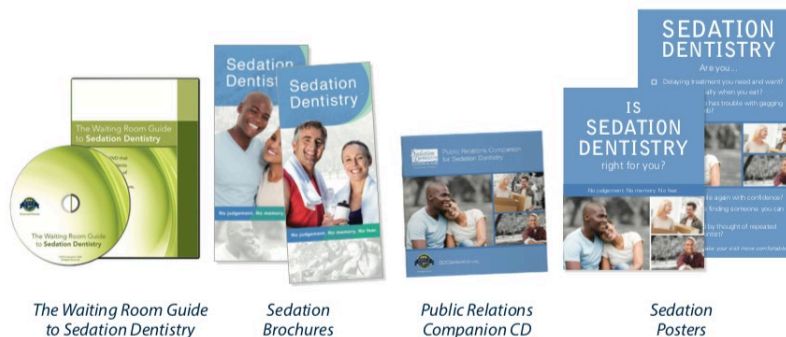
The Sedation Dentistry Guidebook is a tool for launching and optimizing the sedation portion of your practice with many pieces applicable practice wide. It was designed for both new and experienced sedation dentists. Using the Guidebook as directed will create more time and opportunities for you to do high-value patient work. Annual membership, after the first year, ensures access to continuous updates and additions.

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