

The Complete Clinician Model

Being Vulnerable to Build Trust

VULNERABILITY IS NOT A WEAKNESS

Author, researcher, and expert on social connection Brené Brown defines vulnerability as **“emotional risk, exposure, uncertainty,”** and **“our most accurate measurement of courage—to let ourselves be seen, to be honest.”**

Vulnerability and trust go hand in hand—without them, our work, teams, and patient outcomes suffer. The patient's willingness to allow you to help them takes a lot of trust. It's not just one part of the body you work on, it's a whole person who needs care. Taking time to be vulnerable with your patients build trusts and is an important part of providing care.

HOW TO BE (APPROPRIATELY) VULNERABLE WITH PATIENTS

Some health care providers worry that getting vulnerable with patients is too great a risk. You don't want to send the wrong message, so it's important to figure out how to put patients at ease without crossing a professional line. Here are some strategies:

1. Take time to connect

Connection might be as simple as asking about the patient's family and sharing something about your personal life or interests, or making conversation before a procedure or exam.

2. Remember not all patients are the same

In some cultures it is not acceptable to come in and immediately touch someone's body or start working inside their mouth. Make a habit of first asking permission and making sure the patient is comfortable with your treatment approach.

3. Vulnerability is a two-way street

Vulnerability should not be a one-way street. Instead, it is a mutual process of trust between patient and provider. To accomplish it, you must be willing to be vulnerable by letting your human side show through. You don't need to be an infallible hero. You must be someone they can trust with the expertise to help with their health concerns.

4. Don't be afraid of emotion

Brené Brown talks a lot about shame. It's something we all experience—a feeling that there is some side of ourselves that we cannot let other people see, and if those imperfections are exposed we are somehow less worthy of their confidence or trust. Let patients know you are listening, you hear them, you care, and this is a safe space. They can be free to let go of their fear of being vulnerable, which can help release stress that might be contributing to their health status.