

Engagement with Tāngata Whaiora

Top Five Important Points

- Create a Safe Clinic Environment that is comfortable and inclusive for tāngata whaiora, with diverse seating accommodations for all body types and their support people.
- Clinician Self-Reflection: Be aware of personal values and assumptions, practice reflective listening, challenge biases, and prepare culturally to understand tāngata whaiora and their whānau.
- Initial Contact and Connection: Acknowledge tāngata whaiora, make them feel welcome, engage in introductions to establish a connection, and ensuring seating arrangements reduce power differentials.
- Empowerment and Validation: Empower tāngata whaiora to have control over their health decisions, validating their feelings beyond diabetes and cheer on their successes to increase motivation.
- Normalisation of Diabetes: Normalise the challenges of living with diabetes, acknowledging the difficulties faced by tāngata whaiora, and communicate that these struggles are common.

It is important that tāngata whaiora living with diabetes are made to feel safe and comfortable when discussing sensitive topics that impact them on a day-to-day basis. There are a number of things that services, and health workers can consider to improve the experience of tāngata whaiora.

Kaimahi Considerations

What is happening for you as kaimahi today can influence your interactions with tāngata whaiora, which will impact their health outcomes. We all have busy, and sometimes challenging, lives both within and outside of our work. It is important to reset your thinking, so that you can focus on your tangata whaiora, make them feel valued, and increase your job satisfaction.

Personal Values and Assumptions - Consider how your own values impact your interactions with tāngata whaiora. Your values about eating, weight, shape and size may differ from the values of tāngata whaiora and whānau and that is okay. It can also be easy to make assumptions about tāngata whaiora, based on their medical record, even before you have seen them. Being aware of your own values and assumptions means you can put them to one side when engaging with tāngata whaiora. Be open and curious about your tangata whaiora and gain an understanding of how diabetes *fits in with their* life, as opposed to diabetes *being their* life. This can also assert that the control is tangata whaiora centred.

Some strategies you can utilise:

Try to de-clutter your mind of any assumptions or biases just prior to greeting tāngata whaiora

Work on a breathing technique or use a stress ball to re-set

Practice reflective listening with tāngata whaiora – this is a powerful tool that creates connection, rapport and empathy

Challenge your own biases by approaching each interaction with curiosity, respect, and a willingness to be guided by tāngata whaiora in how they define wellbeing.

Be aware of your body language, as well as tāngata whaiora and whānau body language. Being quiet and making minimal eye contact can be a sign of respect. Ensure body language is open and welcoming.

Reflect on how you have prepared yourself culturally to really understand the tāngata whaiora and whānau — this includes positioning yourself as a learner with humility and openness toward their cultural values, practices, and ways of being.

Notice the way tāngata whaiora are discussed within your team and challenge this – remember they are human beings, diabetes is difficult to manage and there is no such thing as perfect management with diabetes

Clinic Appointment Considerations

Tāngata whaiora may feel overwhelmed or anxious when coming to the appointment; these feelings can last from the waiting space to the clinic space, and finally the consultation room. It is important to recognise this and make tāngata whaiora feel as safe as possible so that the appointment is beneficial to all.

Initial Contact – This can be the “make or break” of a clinical engagement. Acknowledge who has attended recognising privacy of the tāngata whaiora and their whānau if still in the waiting space.

Mōrena/ Kia ora / Hello and more...

“Thank you for attending this appointment” ... how was your trip in?

Eye Contact – Direct eye contact with tāngata whaiora and/or whānau may vary based on cultural and/or individual preferences. Some cultures find direct eye contact intimidating and challenging and no eye contact can also be seen as a sign of respect. It is important to follow their lead and match the level of eye contact they are comfortable with.

Weight Measures – These can be very confronting for tāngata whaiora who have concerns about diabetes, eating, and body satisfaction. Consider whether a current weight is clinically relevant. Have you considered how they may feel about their weight being taken? Further information is available in the section “talking about weight”.

Consider blind weighing and ask your tāngata whaiora if they want to know their weight

Mihi / Introductions and Whanaungatanga / Connection – Providing space for introductions and ensuring there is a sense of connection with tāngata whaiora, creates safety and a sense of belonging. Identifying common ground helps to humanise yourself as kaimahi. Consider spiritual safety as part of creating a sense of connection. For example, offering an opening karakia can support wairua and set a respectful tone for the appointment—if both kaimahi and tāngata whaiora are comfortable.

“I see that you are wearing an All Blacks T-Shirt, did you watch the game on....?”

“I saw in a clinic letter that you walk your dog for regular exercise- I have a scruffy dog myself”

Acknowledging Cultural Identity – Make the effort to pronounce tāngata whaiora and whānau names correctly—if unsure, ask respectfully. Names carry deep cultural meaning and are part of affirming identity and mana. You may also wish to invite tāngata whaiora to share aspects of their culture, values, or beliefs that might help guide the appointment or support their wellbeing.

“Is there anything about your culture, values, or whānau you'd like us to keep in mind as we go through today's appointment?”

“Let me know if there's anything from your background, culture, or whānau that would help guide how we work together.”

Location of Seating – There is an implicit power differential between kaimahi and tāngata whaiora. Physical measures are one small way to help address this; consider where you as kaimahi are sitting in the clinic room and ensure your attention is on them, not other tasks.

Avoid sitting behind a desk or focussing on the computer or notes. Ensure that your focus is on the tāngata whaiora and their whānau. Adjust your chair height so you are eye-level.

Empowerment – It is important to tāngata whaiora to have a sense of control and ownership over their own health and decision making. This aids with building self-efficacy and control over their own healthcare, increases sustainability of healthy behaviour changes, and helps to reduce the power differential that exists in health care settings; which all lead to better health outcomes.

“What would you like out of this appointment? Take your time to give this some thought.”

“What's important to discuss with you today? There are some things that I would like to cover today – do you want to do these before or after what you want to cover?”

“You're welcome to ask anything during our time together—your questions matter, and it's okay to pause or go over anything again.”

Validation – Tāngata whaiora are not just people with diabetes. They are also a partner – parent – whānau member – employee with their own preferences and lives beyond diabetes. It is important to validate how tāngata whaiora feel about their experiences and be mindful of what’s happening in their life and any other priorities they may have.

“Diabetes is frustrating; it can be exhausting and time consuming”

“There is no perfect with diabetes”

Strength Spotting - Although the focus of the appointment may be diabetes, ask and reflect with tāngata whaiora about other successes and cheer them on. This can help with increased motivation and hope towards their diabetes specific tasks & management. Strength Spotting can also be used directly for diabetes management – focussing on what they are doing well, there will be something.

“That’s fabulous you passed all your university exams. You must be so proud of yourself.”

“That’s great you had 20% time in range. How did you do that?”

Normalisation – Diabetes is a challenging health condition impacting all areas of tāngata whaiora lives; yet this is not often communicated by kaimahi. Normalising the struggles that diabetes presents helps to empower tāngata whaiora, as well as reducing the perception of isolation.

“Many of the people who I see in this office, find living with diabetes really difficult, particularly the balance of what kaimahi recommend and real life.”

Service Level Considerations

Clinic Appointment Letter - This is the first step in the engagement process, and it is important that the letter creates a warm and inclusive tone. Some examples:

“This appointment is for you. Please think about what you would like to discuss and write down any questions to ensure they are all answered.”

“Feel free to bring support people along with you.”

Environment & Workplace/ Creating a Safe Place - Despite all work environments being different, it is important to acknowledge that we are familiar with the environment, but tāngata whaiora will not be. They may also feel the “power” of the institution when they are there. Ensuring a comfortable space is vital. Some recommendations:

Waiting room and consultation space that is visually appealing without unnecessary medical equipment, and posters/documents that may be perceived as threats (e.g., complications) or stigmatising (e.g., weight loss measures).

Use imagery in posters with people from all ethnicities, ages, genders, sizes and abilities.

Comfortable seating in both the waiting and consultation rooms that accommodate all bodies with additional seating for whānau.