

In striving to maximize the client's potential for optimal health, nurses must clearly understand the power of communication in shaping professional relationships. Without well-refined communication skills, nurses cannot establish therapeutic relationships with clients. _____ are those in which nurses communicate with clients to assist them in attaining optimal health or to support them through difficult situations. The quality of communication between the nurse and the client is an essential determinant of the success of the helping relationship (_____).

Communication is an essential element of helping others. Mutual goals cannot be defined or achieved without effective communication.

FIGURE 4.1 Careful use of humor enhances the nurse–client relationship.

People are influenced by and in turn influence those whom they encounter. This reciprocal process suggests that the most important human attributes are not only openness to interpersonal experiences but also power to influence self and others. Nurses may be perceived as having power over the persons whom they serve because of their specialized knowledge of and skills in health care. In order to maintain a therapeutic relationship, there needs to be professional boundaries. _____ are imaginary lines that separate the nurse from the patient that occur to maintain the integrity of the therapeutic relationship. Patients possess vulnerability when receiving professional nursing services. Boundary crossings are brief incursions across the invisible barriers. They occur when the nurses use patients for personal gain or when there is confusion about the nature of the special therapeutic relationship either on the nurse's or patient's part. Some examples of boundary crossing are overinvolvement, excessive personal disclosure on the nurse's part, secretive behavior, providing "special treatment" to a single patient, flirtatious actions, and even sexual misconduct. Nurses must be alert to warning signs of potential and actual boundary violations. Careless use of social media increases the likelihood of boundary encroachment. When nurses engage in self-reflection to evaluate patient interactions, they might become more self-aware of the effectiveness of their communication to optimize the nurse–patient relationship (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2014).

Humans influence one another primarily through communication, which is defined as the "exchange of meanings between and among individuals through a shared system of symbols that have the same meaning for both the sender and the receiver of the message" (Vestal, 1995, p. 51). Through communication during nurse–client interactions, the nurse hopes to enable