Scripting Tips

1. Acknowledge patient’s feelings without dwelling on them. It’s important to note that acknowledging their feelings doesn’t mean you necessarily agree with why they are upset.

2. Be empathetic but then refocus on the issue at hand.
   - “Mrs. Jones, I can see that you are frustrated about having to wait three weeks for your next appointment (acknowledgment of feelings). Let’s see what we can do to try and get you in sooner” (refocus on solving problem).

3. Apologize if you or someone else has made an error or inconvenienced the patient.
   - “Mr. Smith, I am so sorry that we had to cancel your appointment today (apology). Your dentist is sick, and we did not want to risk you getting sick, too (explanation). Let’s find another appointment time that works for you” (focus on solving problem).

4. Explain relevant policies or procedures in a simple, factual, and non-judgmental way so that the patient understands the reason for the policy. Patients should know that the policies are not arbitrary, and they are consistently enforced to ALL patients.
   - “Mrs. Jones, I understand you are upset that you have been dismissed from the practice (acknowledgment of feelings), but there truly is nothing I can do about the situation. When you became a patient of our practice, you agreed in writing to abide by our no-show policy, and you have repeatedly failed to keep your scheduled dental appointments. At our clinic, we only have a limited number of dental appointments each day. We have far more patients with serious dental problems than appointment slots available. For that reason, we must reserve those valuable appointment slots for patients who will respect and abide by our no-show policy. In order to be fair and treat all our patients equally, we cannot make exceptions for anyone (explanation). I’m sorry, but I’m afraid I can’t help you.”

5. Isolate the disruptive patient who may be “playing to the crowd” by inviting them to talk with you in a quiet area. Use respect for their privacy as the reason for removing them.
   - “Mr. Smith, I can see that you are upset (acknowledgment of feelings). To protect your privacy, let’s go talk about this in our patient consultation room.”

6. When patients continue to argue and keep going over and over the same ground, continue to acknowledge their feelings but stay on message.
   - “Mrs. Jones, I know this upsets you (acknowledgment of feelings), but when patients are more than 10 minutes late for their scheduled appointment, we have to remove the appointment from the schedule. Otherwise, our providers will fall behind, and patients who showed up on time for their appointments would end up
having to wait to be seen (explanation). I’m sure you can see that that wouldn’t be fair. You have two options: if you can wait, we will work you back into the schedule today as soon as an opening appears. But if you can’t wait, we can make an appointment for you on another day. Which option would work best for you? (Giving the patient the choice).

7. No matter what, keep your emotions in check. Responding in kind to patients who are rude or insulting will only escalate the situation. Acknowledge their feelings and refocus on the problem at hand.

8. Set limits (in a calm tone) with patients who use foul language.
   - “Mr. Smith, I can see that you are very upset (acknowledgment of feelings), but I can’t help you if you are going to be verbally abusive to me. If you don’t stop swearing, I will have to end this conversation (setting limits). It’s up to you whether you would like to continue.” (Giving the patient the choice).

9. No matter how difficult the interaction has been, end it on a positive note and provide a summary of what was discussed.
   - “Mrs. Jones, I appreciate your bringing this problem to our attention so we could help resolve it. You told us that you didn’t get the message left on your home phone and that is why you missed your appointment. We have marked your cell phone in our computer as the number to call for your future courtesy reminder calls. Thank you for allowing us to review our no-show policy with you. This incident is exactly why we allow one missed appointment before the policy goes into effect. Now that we have the best number to reach you at and we’ve had the chance to discuss this together I’m sure there won’t be any problems in the future.”