

## **BRAIN TRAINING TO HELP YOU SMILE**

**Lil Niddrie, Denplan Trainer, looks at how Neuro-Linguistic Programming can help you build rapport with both team members and patients for more beneficial and rewarding relationships.**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) can be viewed as an ‘instruction manual’ for understanding the mind and how humans think and experience the world. By helping us to understand the thoughts, behaviour and beliefs of others, and ourselves, NLP is a powerful tool to enhance our communication and interaction skills. This can not only be hugely useful when it come to building rapport with patients, but it can also help put nervous patient at their ease and improve working relationships between staff members.

While the structure of something so subjective does not lend itself to precise ‘instructions’, NLP uses models of how our thoughts, behaviour and beliefs can assist or limit us in our every-day lives or in achieving our ambitions. The following guide is designed to give you a basic understanding of NLP and how it can help make all your practice relationships more successful.

### **So what is NLP?**

I am sure we can all agree that relationships are a fundamental part of our lives, so it is important to know how to relate to a wide range of personality types and characters. NLP can help show us how we can build rapport, maintain relationships and achieve positive outcomes. Some of the guidance NLP offers includes:

- Adopting a similar stance to people we interact with and matching their gestures, voice, tone and speed of speech
- Picking up on key words, favourite phrases and ways of speaking and building them subtly into conversations
- Seeking to connect with everyone by taking a genuine interest in getting to know what is important to them
- Being clear about the outcomes you want to achieve
- Gaining flexibility in order to modify your behaviour and achieve positive outcomes

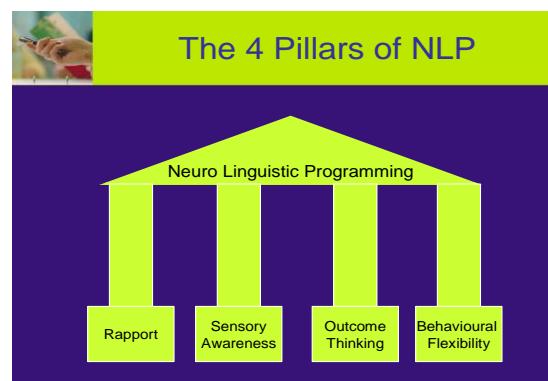
In turn, this can assist you to not only present information to patients and colleagues in a way which they can relate to, but it can also increase the impact of the written word in your literature and on your website by using the right language.

It can also help make your practice environment more comfortable allow you to build stronger relationships with patients and colleagues by negotiating positive outcomes.

### The Four Pillars of NLP<sup>1</sup>

NLP is based around four key elements (figure 1):

- **Rapport** – is about making a two-way connection, is central to successful communication and needs to be established before you can expect anyone to listen to you. NLP looks at techniques to gain rapport with even the most challenging of people
- **Sensory awareness** – NLP examines the power of our five senses and how our sensory awareness can enrich our world and be used to our benefit.
- **Outcome thinking** – focuses on what we want to achieve using techniques to make the best decisions and choices which create win-win situations.
- **Behavioural flexibility** – is about how to do something differently when what you are currently doing is not working. Being flexible is key to practising NLP.



(Fig 1)

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<sup>1</sup> Neuro Linguistic Programming for Dummies by Romilla Ready and Kate Burton

### **What does NEURO stand for?**

The word 'neuro' refers to our thinking patterns and how we process and store information in our minds. We gather, process and store information through our five senses known as "representational systems":

1. Sight - Visual
2. Sound - Auditory
3. Touch/feelings - Kinaesthetic
4. Taste - Gustatory
5. Smell - Olfactory

We use all five representational systems but as we are bombarded with approximately two billion bits of information per second, our conscious mind filters some of it out. Therefore the majority of us have a sensory preference which tends to be sight, sound or touch/feelings. Even though we still take information in through smell and taste, these do not tend to be a dominant preference. Our preferences impact on the way we represent our external world inside our heads which in turn can influence our physiology, emotions and our behaviour. Therefore if someone is using a different representational system from you, this can result in a more challenging relationship.

### **What does LINGUISTIC stand for?**

This part explores the way we use language both inwardly to ourselves and outwardly in conversation with others. If we can become aware of patterns in our own and others' language we can start to understand how what we say affects us and the people with whom we interact.

Similarly to body language, the words we use also give clues to our preferred representational system and in just the same way, we are able to match the words used by others in order to build rapport. (Figure 2)

Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
“Keep an <b>eye</b> on things” “Take a long term <b>view</b> ” “I get the <b>picture</b> ”	“Able to <b>tune</b> into new ideas” “Maintain <b>harmonious</b> relationships” “I like the <b>sound</b> of that”	“Keep a <b>balance</b> ” “Hold <b>tight</b> onto reality” “I can <b>grasp</b> what you are saying”

(Fig 2)

Really effective communication is when you can match language to the preferred style of another. This can be quite a challenge, so start with generally enriching your language by using words from all representational systems.

Using sensory rich words from the different representational systems is a technique used by many great orators to bring passion and life to what they say. Why not use this technique in your practice literature and on your website? For example: “Smile Dental is located in the **picturesque** (visual) village of Smileville offering a **warm** (kinaesthetic) welcome and **tranquil** (auditory) environment for all our patients”

### What does PROGRAMMING stand for?

When we experience something new we start a program in our mind, if we repeat it, then that program becomes a pattern of behaviour or a strategy. For example, if you walk through a fully grown wheat field once, the path is barely identifiable as most of the wheat bounces back into place. If however, you walk that same path several times, you will have created a clear path. If you were passing through the field again you would probably use that path rather than struggling through another. In a similar way this is like the programs in our heads. As we grow up we are constantly learning ways to deal with situations and so we create programmes (paths) and the more we repeat them the easier they become for example, learning to drive.

Some of these programmes of behaviour are useful to us while others are not. If another car were to cut you up, a useful programme would be to remain calm and move out of the way of the dangerous driver. A programme which has less use is to get so angry that your driving becomes aggressive and dangerous too. NLP focuses on reproducing the programmes that are beneficial and changing the ones which are not.

Some companies offer tailor-made training days, which are specific to your practices needs and can even incorporate a modules focused NLP. Some of these courses can also count towards verifiable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) when undertaken in accordance with GDC requirements. This type of event provides an ideal opportunity for staff in similar roles to meet and learn together, and will benefit both your employees and your practice.

It is clear that forming good relationships is vital to a thriving business and by using NLP techniques you can form positive associations with new patients, existing ones and suppliers, to ensure the ongoing success of your practice.

**1,235 words**

#### **About the Author**

**Lil Niddrie:** Since joining Denplan in 1993, Lil has worked in many areas of the company to support dental practices. She now combines her knowledge and experience to deliver a wide range of training. Lil is a qualified practitioner of hypnotherapy, Emotional Freedom Technique and Neuro-Linguistic Programming.