Talking with and providing comfort to strangers is a vital skill for people who work in a health care setting. As a skill, it gets better with practice.

For this assignment, have a conversation with a stranger each day this summer. A conversation is at least 3 back-and-forth exchanges, and each must be with a stranger. Get out to the park, grocery store or Tropical Smoothie, and practice as much as reasonable!

Things to consider:

- volume (are they hard of hearing, is your voice too timid, does it seem like you're yelling)
- diction (do you mumble, does your pronunciation get worse at the end of a sentence--which is very common)
- pacing (do you talk too fast--hard to understand; do you talk too slowly--can be patronizing)
- focus (are you listening to their answers? are you interrupting them?)
- eye contact (enough to let them know they're important, but not so much as to be creepy)
- personal spacing (too far/too close for different contexts)
- tone of voice (upbeat, smiling voice)
- use of laughter (fun, positive, but not laughing at people or silly)
- topics (neutral, upbeat, positive. Avoid personal questions, or talk of religion, politics, or illness)

At the end of the summer, write a 2 page reflection on your experiences in talking with strangers. Your reflection might include: Relate interesting vignettes. Did it get easier as the summer progressed? Which topics worked best for you? Which areas do you feel you struggled with the most? If you had to rate yourself on the conversation skills listed above, how would you rate yourself at the beginning and end of the summer? What are you most proud of? What are you still working on improving?