



CAREGIVER ASSISTANCE NEWS

“CARING FOR YOU ... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Communication – Getting It Right

The right words can make all the difference

Everybody needs skills to communicate effectively. Listen *actively* and make a conscious effort to understand the other person, whether in your own family, or in a professional caregiver relationship. This is especially important when problems or issues arise:

Assess the situation.

Listen to every person who is involved to figure out what the issue *really* is. Look for meaning and *emotions behind* what is being said.

Let them know you understand. You can share their feelings without becoming overwhelmed by their issues.

Be a reporter, not a judge. Use *facts* rather than opinions or assumptions to describe a medical problem. Say, “Sam can’t climb up a set of stairs without help,” instead of “Sam may have a heart problem.”

Maintain personal balance. Allow yourself time to decompress and have a separate life, filled with your own activities and down time. Find people you can confide in when you are confused or overwhelmed. Join a support group if you feel isolated.

Avoid guilt, depression, and judgments. Grief, frustration and feeling overwhelmed are normal emotions. Accept the tough outcomes and still feel good that you gave it your best.

Anger Can Make You Sick

When communication fails, stress levels go up. Higher stress is associated with heart attacks, high blood pressure, and more severe diabetes symptoms. Stay healthy—and help those in your care stay healthier—by asking yourself these questions to help reduce stress and avoid anger:

→ Is what I am arguing about really important? Pick your battles and let the small stuff go.

→ Am I storing up resentments from the past that make things seem worse now? Stay on the topic—don’t bring past issues into the current discussion.

→ Don’t take it personally. Be polite and keep your boundaries. You don’t need to get angry just because you don’t like what someone is saying.



Low Health Literacy and Verbal Communication

Patients with poor health literacy tend to be more responsive to information designed to promote patient action, motivation, and self-empowerment than to detailed facts.

- If you think the person in your care has difficulty understanding written or spoken directions, a good approach is to say, “A lot of people have trouble reading and remembering these materials. How can I help you?”



- Use commonly understood words. For instance, use “keeps bones strong” instead of “prevents osteoporosis.”

- Slow down and *take time to listen* to the concerns of the person in your care. Create an atmosphere of respect and comfort. Build trust with the person.

- Remember that less than half of the information provided to patients during a doctor’s visit is retained.

Source: Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc.; www.chcs.org

NEXT ISSUE . . . VISION LOSS / HOME ACCIDENT PREVENTION

The Ombudsman program can handle your concerns about areas such as elder abuse, client care, consumer rights, etc. For more information, call 1-800-582-7277.

For information about Ohio Medicaid programs or to report suspected Medicaid fraud, you may call the Ohio Medicaid Fraud Hotline at 1-800-324-8680.

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**Solutions That Work**

- **Listen for the feeling** behind the words. Everyone needs to feel someone is listening.
- **Validate the other person's feelings.** Say something like: "I understand you feel angry (or unhappy, or frustrated, or whatever)."
- If a discussion becomes verbally abusive, **walk away or hang up** the phone. The illness or disability is to blame, not you, not the other person. Continue the discussion when everyone has calmed down.
- **Let the person in your care make some care decisions** so they don't feel powerless.
- **Show affection and gratitude.** Hug your care recipient, if welcome, and tell her you appreciate her.

*Inspiration*

*Always be a little kinder than necessary.*

~ Sir James M. Barrie, Author of Peter Pan

**Note – Being Heard**

Sometimes communication is made more difficult by the simple fact that the other person is hard of hearing. When speaking to a senior who is hard of hearing, make sure your face is in the light so that your lips and facial expressions can be seen. Speak in a normal tone, facing the person, and making eye contact.



**Communicating with a Person with Dementia**

Remember, it is most important to treat a person with dementia with dignity and respect. Avoid talking down or talking to others who are present as if the person with dementia is not there. At all times be aware of your tone of voice and body language. Do not use the high-pitched voice that people sometimes use when speaking to children. Lower your pitch and volume, and stay relaxed. Try not to stand over the person if seated, which may be interpreted as being bossy or intimidating.

The person in your care may not understand your words, but respond to the tone of your voice or your posture, and will intuitively decide whether to respond to you as friend or foe. Coping with changes in communication is one of the biggest challenges that caregivers and family member face when caring for persons with dementia. Unfortunately, the challenge increases as the disease progresses.

*Taking Care of Yourself* . . . . **Change**

**Negative Self Talk**

We all have "tapes" that play in our head, whether we're aware of them or not. They are the things we tell ourselves out of habit, sometimes habits formed in childhood. For a couple days, write down the thoughts that you catch flowing into your head. See how many of them are positive, and how many are negative. Then, consciously try replacing any negative thoughts with positive, encouraging ones. You'll feel better almost instantly.



**Don't Fall—Be Safe Reminder** Is the phone close by so you don't have to rush to answer it? Do you get up slowly?



**Live Life Laughing!**

If pain means gain, then I'm gaining something.



*Good Manners—Stay Engaged*

Stay engaged in the conversation. Encourage the person in your care to write a journal or record stories for the family to cherish and remember. Be excited to hear the stories again and again.

**FAST FACT**

*Health literacy is the ability to read, understand, and act on health care information. Nearly 50% of all adults may have problems understanding prescriptions, appointment slips, informed consent documents, insurance forms, and health education material.*

Source: National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS)

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