

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Compassionate Communication Skills

A Better Relationship with the Person in Your Care

The stresses of caring for someone can create a buildup of tension, frustration and fatigue. Our conditioning sometimes tells us to blame someone or anyone for how we feel—it's the “difficult” person in care, the “non-communicative family members” or the “inadequate” health care system. Blame can momentarily relieve some tension, but it also leads to other unpleasant feelings such as anger, resentment and disappointment.

Practicing compassionate communication like Nonviolent Communication (NVC) instead of blame can bring more understanding and deeper relief. Giving ourselves and others even a few moments of empathy in a difficult situation can increase safety, trust and mental health.

One way to have more empathy for ourselves and others when we are in emotional pain is to follow the “Observation, Feelings, Needs and Requests” model. Try this next time you have painful feelings, and notice if you experience a shift.

Observation - When you have uncomfortable feelings like anger, frustration, or sadness, first make an *observation* about what is stimulating your pain. An observation has no judgment or evaluation in it. It's something that is so factual that it could be captured by a video camera.



For example, “Mary refused to eat her dinner tonight” is not an observation - there's an evaluation there that Mary is “refusing” something, and that judgmental thought can lead us to feel frustration or resentment. An observation would be, “When I offered Mary her dinner, she did not eat it.” Observations help us get clarity about what really happened versus the story we are telling ourselves.

Feelings - Next, notice what *feelings* you are having about this event. Feelings arise in the body, as opposed to thoughts, which are in the head. They only happen inside us - for example, joy, fear, worry or grief. (Watch out for “false feelings,” which are things others are doing to us, like “unappreciated,” “insulted” or “unsupported.”)

Needs - *Needs* are values that are universal to all human beings - for example: justice, care, love, health, kindness, support, and cooperation. Sometimes one person isn't meeting our needs, but we can get the need met somewhere else, because meeting our basic human needs is important! The key is to remember that no one

Article continues
on page 2

person is responsible for meeting our needs - we can get them met many ways. What are your needs that aren't being met in this painful situation? Make a list.

Request - Next, try making a *request*.

A compassionate request is specific and doable, and gives other person involved choice. It is helpful to name our needs when we make the request. For example, "Mary, your health [need] is important to me. I'd like to offer you dinner again in an hour, and I would like to know if you'd be willing to try a few bites then [request]. I could use your support [another need] to make sure your body gets the nutrition it needs."



You can practice communicating compassionately with yourself, which is called *self-empathy*. Acknowledge your feelings and needs in a journal or in a few minutes of reflection. For example, "When Mary did not eat the dinner I offered her [observation], I sure felt frustrated and upset [feelings]. Some support and cooperation [needs] would be really wonderful."

Compassionate communication doesn't "fix" some of the very difficult challenges and realities of being a caregiver, but it does lead to kindness, gentleness, and more resilience when we do this hard work. You might also try making an observation, feeling, needs and request guess for the person in your care or in the care team to better understand them and feel more compassion and connection and less judgment.

Empathetic compassionate communication is a practice that becomes more natural and automatic the more you do it. Try keeping a journal of your observations, feelings, needs and requests when difficult feelings arise, or find a buddy to practice with.

For more on compassionate communication in healthcare, see Mel Sears book, "Humanizing Health Care." For more on Nonviolent Communication, see <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/learn-nonviolent-communication/nvc-healthcare/>

Communication Is Not Just Speaking

As much as 90% of our communication is non-verbal. When the person in your care can no longer communicate with words, you can communicate that you care about him by the *tone* of your voice. A hug speaks more clearly than words. Music and dancing can also be a kind of communication. People with Alzheimer's may be able to sing a song with you, even though they can no longer speak. Dancing together can communicate your affection for each other.

Taking Care of Yourself— Feelings and Needs

Think of a situation that is causing you some distress and make a list of the feelings and needs you have about it. Notice if you feel any relief after acknowledging you have these feelings and needs.

Some Basic Feelings We All Have:

Angry, annoyed, concerned, confused, disappointed, discouraged, distressed, embarrassed, frustrated, helpless, hopeless, impatient, irritated, lonely, nervous, overwhelmed, puzzled, reluctant, sad, uncomfortable

Some Basic Needs We All Have:

Acceptance, appreciation, autonomy, celebration, choice, closeness, community, consideration, emotional and physical safety, food, fun, honesty, integrity, laughter, love, order, movement, respect, rest, support, trust, understanding.

Source: <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/learn-nonviolent-communication/feelings/>



Live Life Laughing!

Granny, what is a store?

Well honey, it's a place where we went to buy things.



Inspiration

If you don't like the road you're walking, start paving another one.

—Dolly Parton

Memory Care - Leaving the Person Alone at Home

Before leaving him alone, consider if he can recognize an emergency such as a fire and know how to call 911 or will he try to pursue former interests such as cooking or working with power tools.

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SAFETY TIPS— Dental Care During Covid

Dental care is important for overall wellness. A study found that hospitalized Covid patients with extreme gum disease were 22 times more likely to suffer from acute respiratory problems and to be placed on a ventilator.

As dental offices reopen, it is important that people return for their regular check-ups. It's especially important not to allow a toothache or other symptoms to get worse without seeing a dentist.

People should feel comfortable returning to the dental office. But if you or the person in your care are anxious about visiting a dental office during Covid, call and ask the receptionist questions to insure there are policies and protocols in place, including protective gear, social distancing and air filters.

For low-cost dental treatment programs, check with your dental office, university dental schools or the local Area Agency on Aging.

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“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

Q U I C K Q U I Z

When communication fails, stress levels go up. Higher stress is associated with heart attacks, high blood pressure, and more severe diabetes symptoms. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Compassionate communication doesn't "fix" some of the very difficult challenges and realities of being a caregiver, but it does lead to kindness, gentleness, and more resilience when we do this hard work.
T F
2. Dental care doesn't matter for overall wellness.
T F
3. Observations are free of our judgments.
T F
4. Blame can momentarily relieve some tension, but it also leads to other unpleasant feelings such as anger, resentment and disappointment.
T F
5. Observations help us get clarity about what really happened versus the story we are telling ourselves.
T F
6. Before leaving a person with dementia alone, consider if he can recognize an emergency such as a fire and know how to call 911.
T F
7. One way to have more empathy for ourselves and others when we are in emotional pain is to follow the "Observation, Feelings, Needs and Requests" model.
T F
8. When the person in your care can no longer communicate with words, you can communicate that you care about him by the *tone* of your voice.
T F
9. People with Alzheimer's may be able to sing a song with you, even though they can no longer speak.
T F
10. You cannot practice communicating compassionately with yourself.
T F

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____