

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Communication When Providing Care

When you talk to the person you are assisting, do they understand you? And do you understand them? No matter how difficult these challenges are, do not give up trying to *understand* and being *understood*. A few simple techniques can help.

Talking to Someone Who Is Hard of Hearing

Loss of hearing can make people seem slow or not interested. Often, however, they simply can't hear what others are saying. They may not have their hearing aid turned up. To make sure *you* can be heard:

- **Stand, sit, or squat** so you are at eye level with the person.
- **Make sure your face is in the light** so that your lips and facial expressions can be seen.
- **Use simple sentences.** For example, “Do you want to eat?”
- **Use body language** such as nodding or pointing and lots of facial expressions.
- **Speak in a normal tone**, facing the person, and making eye contact. Do not shout.

Understanding Alzheimer's Communication

Learning how to communicate with someone with Alzheimer's is very important. These people have their own reality so **do not try to reason with them**. If *you* always **remain calm**,

you can keep them calm too. The most important thing to remember is **respond to their emotions—not to their behavior**.



To improve your chances of being understood:

- ➔ **Reduce background noise.** (Loud noises can actually cause *pain* to someone with Alzheimer's.)
- ➔ **Establish eye contact.** If the person is standing, stand; if the person is sitting, sit or squat down.
- ➔ **Address the person by name** and remind him or her of your name.
- ➔ **Explain what you are going to do** before you do it using one-step commands. Point to the object you are discussing. For example, say, “Do you want your slippers?” not “Do you want these?”
- ➔ **Avoid expressions that may cause confusion.** Don't say, “Jump into bed.” Instead, say, “Get into bed.”

Before starting a conversation, announce what you are going to talk about. For example, say, “Betty, let's talk about our trip to the doctor's office.” When you change the subject, say so—for example, “Betty, now let's talk about dinner.”

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Encourage Cooperation

First, make sure he *understands what* you are asking. He may be confused, especially in cases of dementia, or he may be feeling ill and simply *unable* to respond quickly.

Make sure he is comfortable and not sick—He may be confused, overstimulated, or in physical pain.

Be a listener—Take time to ask the person in your care how he is doing. Sometimes combative behavior is a symptom of a deeper issue. For example, a person may refuse to be bathed because he is feeling modest. Or he may refuse to eat in response to a sense of loss of control. Giving the person choices can make him more likely to cooperate.

Be patient—Your schedule may be overwhelming, but the person in your care is on his own schedule. Allow more time than usual for simple tasks. Too many activities at once can provoke a reaction because the person feels overwhelmed.

Remain calm. Seeing you calm may help calm him down.

When the person is upset, delay the personal care if possible. Can the task you are attempting be put off until the person is calmer?

Do not contradict his reality. Affirm his feelings. Say, “I see you are angry.” If he believes something to be true, do not disagree, unless it poses a physical threat.

Track the behavior. Keep notes on times of day, frequency, or type of behavior problem.

Tips on Changing What YOU Do

You may not be able to control the other person’s behavior, but you can control your own. Here’s how to appear less *confrontational* to the person who is agitated:

Stand to the side of him or at eye level rather than towering over him—especially if there are several people tending to him at once.

Don’t expect an immediate response. Allow extra time.

Keep the room calm. Turn off the TV and radio.

Speak clearly and slowly. Repeat softly what is necessary.

Handling Angry Outbursts or Uncooperative Behavior

First, try to diffuse the anger. There are several ways to do this. You will have to experiment to see what works best with the person in your care.

You can try:

Humor—Making light of the situation, but *not* the person.

Empathy—“I see how upset you are and I understand.”

Changing the Subject—Address what he is saying briefly and then move on to a different topic.

Take a Break—Tell the person you have a task to take care of in another room and that you’ll discuss the issue in a little while. This will give him time to cool down and you a chance to take some deep breaths to get centered again.

Taking Care of Yourself— Changing Behaviors One Step at a Time

Sometimes we are not aware that our behaviors can affect other people's behaviors.

To be able to make changes in our interactions with others, we must try to improve on our behaviors one step at a time. Try these simple steps:

- **Be generous with compliments.** Do not wait for others to do significant accomplishments before you give them a positive feedback. Say something nice whenever you catch them doing a good job, no matter how small.
- **Be generous with your smiles.** A smile can be encouraging for someone who is struggling to do some task and can foster self-esteem.
- **Do not allow yourself to nurture negative thoughts.** Try this trick: Wear a rubber band on your wrist for a week. Snap it against your wrist whenever you catch yourself thinking unkind thoughts.
- **Accept others** for who they are and avoid being critical of them.



Inspiration

When you think you have exhausted all possibilities, remember this: you haven't.

—Thomas Edison

Live Life Laughing!

Doctor, help! I swallowed a spoon!

Hold still and do not stir.



Memory Care - When the Person in Your Care is Angry

Sometimes arguing, and refusing to follow directions are the behaviors that accompany Alzheimer's. Other times, the person is frustrated by feeling sick or without control over many aspects of his life, and takes these frustrations out on those around him, especially the caregiver. Remember, he is upset about the *situation*, not you.

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SAFETY TIPS— *Listening: More Important than Talking*

Have you ever *acted* like you were listening to someone who was talking, but in reality you were thinking about what you were going to answer the other person when it's your turn to talk or thinking about something else? Many of us are guilty of not *really* listening to what others say. Ways to improve listening skills:

- ✓ Try not to interrupt someone who is talking.
- ✓ Try to really hear their words and repeat back what they have said. This way, they know that you really *heard* what they said. (Then they might also be more willing to listen to *you*.)
- ✓ Avoid being defensive.
- ✓ Remember to show respect to the other person—even if you do not agree with his actions or words.

Effective communication leads to mutual understanding. It helps both parties find a solution to a problem. This means that your goal is not to win an argument or prove that you are right, but to reach an understanding.

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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

Whether with our own family, or in a professional caregiver relationship, we need skills to communicate effectively and safely. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Effective communication leads to mutual understanding and helps both parties find a solution to a problem.
T F
2. Avoid expressions that may cause confusion. For example, don't say, "Jump into bed." Instead, say, "Get into bed."
T F
3. If a person is hard of hearing, he can understand you better if you shout.
T F
4. Loud noises can actually cause *pain* to someone with Alzheimer's.
T F
5. Body language such as facial expressions and pointing can help make sure you can be heard.
T F
6. It is important to respond to the person with Alzheimer's emotions—not to their behavior.
T F
7. Even if you remain calm, it will not help a person with Alzheimer's remain calm.
T F
8. In Alzheimer's care, do not contradict his reality. Affirm his feelings. Say, "I see you are angry." If he believes something to be true, do not disagree, unless it poses a physical threat.
T F
9. Try to really hear their words and repeat back what they have said. This way, they know that you really *heard* what they said.
T F
10. Stand, sit, or squat so you are at eye level with the person.
T F

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____