



The Elder Care Professional

A newsletter by Family First Home Companions

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10 TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH SENIORS

Whether you deal with seniors in a professional capacity or as a family caregiver with elderly loved ones, communicating with seniors effectively is important to your role in helping them.

What causes communication barriers?

Chronic conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's Disease, hearing loss, and vision loss affect the older person's abilities to understand speech and comprehend what is being conveyed.

Communication can also be hindered by the aging process in older adults which may result in slower processing of information, retirement from work, lessening of power and influence over their own lives, and separation from friends and family.

What are common problems with communicating with older adults?

"All communication with older adults should be based on respect for their life experience," says UAB Professor of Communication Studies Cecil G. Betros, Jr., D.Sc

- The older adult can't hear and may pretend to understand what is being told to him out of embarrassment or frustra-

tion.

- The speed of the speaker is so fast that the senior can't process what is being conveyed.
- Background noise creates interference and distractions throughout the conversation.
- Terms of endearment are used by the speaker in addressing the senior which can diminish the older adult's position as an adult (i.e. "honey", "sweetie", or "baby").
- Not talking face to face to allow for eye contact, non-verbal cues, and/or lip reading (as used by some older adults with hearing loss).

How can you become a better communicator with older adults?

1. Be aware of the person's health issues. If you know that he/she has dementia, for example, make sure a family member or other responsible party is present.
2. Reduce background noise and distractions.
3. Speak clearly, articulately and make eye contact. Move your mouth when you speak and slow down your speech.

4. Adjust your volume appropriately (remember that not all seniors have hearing loss!).

5. Employ visual aids, if possible. For example, "do you have pain in your back (while pointing to your back)?"

6. Smile and be patient. A sincere smile shows that you are understanding. Give the older person time to ask questions and express themselves.

7. Listen and allow the older adult to complete their sentences (ask before helping and don't interject unless it is absolutely necessary).

8. Use short, simple words and sentences.

9. Stick to one topic at a time.

10. Frequently summarize the most important points. Have the person repeat what you explained to ensure he/she understands, and/or repeat the points again.

"Nobody grows old merely by living a number of years. We grow old by deserting our ideals. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul."

Samuel Ullman



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