



COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Effective communication is the foundation of healthy relationships. As a family caregiver, you will be communicating with many people, including the care recipient, other family members and healthcare professionals. Everyone does not always communicate clearly and effectively, especially when dealing with the stress of poor health or caregiving. Communication takes time, effort and the willingness to understand different perspectives.

Family caregivers play a major role in ensuring that the care recipient receives the healthcare they need. Your experience and knowledge is invaluable to others, many of whom will not know the care recipient as well as you do. Being able to communicate this knowledge clearly will benefit everyone.

Below are some tips to help enhance your communication:

- Identify your intention. What is it that you want to say and why? What do you want to walk away with from this encounter?
- Focus on responding rather than reacting. When you react to what someone else has said it is usually based on past experiences and clouded by old emotions. When you respond you are listening to what is currently being said and can interact in an appropriate way. Ask yourself: “Does the strength of my reaction and emotions fit with this current situation?” and “How would I like to respond?”
- Being clear, concise and direct is important. Not coming right out and asking for what you need, hinting or hoping others read your mind does not make good use of anybody’s time.
- Active listening is a key component of communication. To listening effectively you need to avoid distraction, limit your own talking, focus on the other person and demonstrate listening through body language, such as eye contact and nodding.
- You may find yourself in situations where you have no previous experience or the knowledge or skills needed. You may feel like you are solely responsible for figuring out what needs to be done or what the person you are caring for needs. Trying to read the care recipient’s mind, making assumptions and second-guessing can be exhausting. When their health allows, ask them directly what they need from you and how you can best help them. Work as a team.
- Before meeting with healthcare professionals prepare a list of questions to ask or information you want to give them. This will save time and you won’t be distracted trying to remember what you want to ask. Be concise and focus on the key issues.

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