

Communicating Effectively with the Elderly



As a person grows older, they experience changes in hearing, sight, and cognitive ability. These changes can often make it difficult for the caregiver to communicate and engage with the elderly person. Below is a list of some common health impairments, as well as some helpful tips and techniques that can help build a better and stronger, caring environment.

Hearing Problems

It may be possible that elders are losing their hearing. They may be consistently asking you “What?” or not answering you at all. If this is the case, it is important for the elders to be checked and for you to learn new ways of dealing with the hearing loss. Below are some tips that will help you through this process:

- Ask the elder to get a professional hearing test.
- Take the person to get a hearing aid fitted.
- Find a suitable, quiet environment to speak to the person.
- Sit in front of the elder and speak clearly, loudly, and slowly.

Vision Problems

Medical issues may affect the elders’ eyesight. This loss can greatly impact their ability to function independently in many aspects of their lives. Additionally, this will be a taxing situation on their emotional health, leaving them feeling irritated or moody. Below are some tips on how you can approach this situation as the caregiver and help elders cope with vision problems:

- Help them obtain glasses with the correct prescription.
 - Get large-print books and other large-print materials. Consider getting audio books for the person instead.
 - Keep magnifying glasses and reading glasses available in easy-to-find places.
 - Make sure the person has proper lighting.
 - Help the person read when necessary. Read directions, signs, and other important information.
 - Talk to the elder's doctor about their impaired eyesight.
- Write things down.
 - Use simple and clear language.
 - Don't express anger and frustration toward the impaired individual.

Cognitive Problems

Various medical conditions, such as strokes and dementia (including Alzheimer's Disease) can affect an elder's ability to function every day. Seemingly simple activities may not be so simple for the person suffering with cognitive impairment. In addition, his or her regressing mental state can also be very challenging for the caregiver. Below are some tips that will help you and the elder adjust and accommodate their changing abilities:

- Understand how the condition affects the elder and the best ways to care for the person with that condition.
- Be patient, comforting, reassuring, and compassionate.

Emotional Problems

If you or the elderly individual feels angry, resentful, depressed, or irritated, this may inhibit healthy communication and relationships. Below are some tips to help communicate better when emotional problems are involved:

- Seek professional help and find a support group.
- Don't try to ignore the emotions. Find healthy ways to deal with them.
- Talk to trusted people about the problems and encourage the elderly person to talk about emotions.
- Don't make important decisions when upset. Wait for a time when you are feeling calm.
- Inquire of a health professional about medications that may help.

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