

Communication is Key



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Communication is the key to success in many things: marriage, parenting, at work and even planning fun activities. When there is a lack of communication, things inevitably go wrong. Relationships within a caregiving situation are no exception. Maintaining good communication with the person who is being cared for and other family members is the foundation of a healthy caregiver. There are three keys to good communication: speak clearly, listen carefully and respond accurately.

The first key is to speak clearly. First, when you are speaking it is important that you be specific with your request. Never assume the listener knows what you are thinking or feeling.

Second, try to stay focused and discuss only the issue at hand. We often get off track or bring up old issues, especially when strong emotions are involved. This can cause confusion and irritation.

Third, do your best to speak with tact. Be sensitive to the feelings of those listening and be descriptive rather than critical. Starting sentences with “I feel” or “I am” is less threatening to the listener and prevents the blame game.

The second key is listening carefully. The first step is to listen without interrupting or giving advice. Eliminate all distractions and concentrate on what the speaker is saying. It is best to listen and support the person before offering advice.

Second, listen with empathy. You don't have to agree with the other point of view to understand it. If you feel you are being criticized, receive it with an open mind and respond only to the facts, not the anger or fear behind it.

Third, listen to yourself and the tone with which you speak. Be aware of your body language, stay positive and speak calmly so you don't put the listener on the defensive.

The final key to good communication is responding accurately. It is important to be certain that you have heard the message correctly. Ask for clarification if there is anything you don't understand. Restate what you heard to be sure your interpretation is accurate. Pay attention to facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice to get a better understanding of the message. Even if you don't agree with what the speaker is saying, it is important to acknowledge that you understand how they are feeling.

With social distancing, much of our communication is being done over the phone or by emailing or texting. This creates additional challenges as you are unable to watch for body language and facial expressions, making it even more important to speak clearly and listen carefully. Try not to read into things and make assumptions; instead, ask for clarification.

No matter what you are trying to accomplish, speaking clearly, listening carefully and responding accurately will help you achieve your goal. For caregivers, it is an essential step to a healthy caregiving environment. If you have other caregiving questions, please contact your Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC).

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