



Team Member Tips for Communicating with Residents



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Tips for Communicating with Residents

Learning and practicing effective communication techniques may lead to better care for residents, and more fulfilling and effective work for care providers. When communicating with residents, it's important to remember that an individual may or may not suffer from age related impairments that impact communication such as hearing and vision loss, or dementia. Do not make assumptions about patients' abilities and take time to understand the conditions and circumstances that are unique to each resident. Consider the following strategies or techniques when interacting with residents.

Body Language

Body language helps to project the meaning of what you're saying. Studies have shown that body language or non-verbal cues, which include physical behavior, expressions, and mannerisms to are the most important element of communication.^{1,3} When communicating with a resident consider your location and your body language. Always face the person you are talking to and maintain eye contact. A seated position directly opposite the resident may improve communication by reducing surrounding distractions and may also let the resident know you have their full attention. It may be helpful to get the person's attention before you speak by gently touching their shoulder or hand. Be animated while you communicate using facial expressions and gestures when appropriate.¹ It's also helpful to make sure not to touch or block your face while you are speaking, as it may hinder lip reading.²

Language and Tone Use

Residents may experience hearing, vision loss, or memory loss which can change the way information is absorbed and processed. Using simple common language might help the communication process. Talk slowly and clearly to residents using a normal tone of voice, shouting or speaking in raised voice is not necessary and likely will not be effective.¹ Using frequent pauses gives residents time to process what you are saying as you speak. Keep in mind that a high-pitched voice is often harder to hear among those with hearing impairment. Avoid using terms, like "dear" and "hon," to address residents as they tend to sound patronizing.²

Active Listening

When caring for residents, remember that both the resident and caregiver may have difficulty expressing ideas to each other. Being an active listener can help the resident know you are hearing and understanding their communication. Maintaining eye contact with the person you are communicating with is one way to be an active listener, as well as giving affirmative nods, to acknowledge receipt of communications without interrupting the resident.^{2,3}

Building Rapport and Trust

Take the time to get to know the residents you care for. Introduce yourself to new residents and find out their preferred name. Doing so can help to create positive interactions among residents and caregivers. Try not to rush while working with older adults, as feeling rushed leads people to believe they are not being heard or understood.²

References

1. Canadian Hearing Services. (2013). Communication Tips. Accessed: <https://www.chs.ca/communication-tips-0>
2. National Institute on Aging. (2017). Tips for Improving Communication with Older Patients. Accessed: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/tips-improving-communication-older-patients>
3. Segal, J., Smith, M., Robinson, L. and Boose, G. (2019). Non-verbal communication. Accessed: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/nonverbal-communication.htm?pdf=13755>

