
COMMUNICATING WITH SENIORS

Language & Limitations Can Get In The Way

Communication can be very simple. Someone says something, and another person understands what they said...and meant. Of course, not all communication goes so smoothly. Things can get in the way.

For seniors, there may be numerous obstacles to overcome. If they have hearing or sight problems, getting a message through can be more difficult for everyone involved. Chronic pain, symptoms of illnesses and side effects from medications can dull a senior's senses, along with their ability to comprehend. In addition, generational differences can create a language barrier. Slang, references from pop culture and technical jargon can be very confusing.

In all these cases, conversing will demand more concentration and energy. If either of these are in short supply, communication will suffer even more. This can lead to everyone being frustrated and the natural tendency to avoid communication.



More and more seniors have adopted cell phones, voice mail and e-mail. For those who have not, you will have to communicate on their terms, at their pace.

OPEN THE DOOR

Here are some helpful tips for enhancing the flow of communication with seniors.

- Seek the medical and dental help that can improve their hearing, sight and speech.
- Ask questions that generate involvement and check for their level of understanding.
- Have the patience to wait for answers.
- Make it easier for everyone to stay attentive. Cut down on noise and distractions. Make sure the temperature, lighting and seating are as comfortable as possible.
- Speak at a pace and volume that works for the senior. Use visual cues and physical touch to help convey your message.
- Save important conversations for the time of day when their energy and concentration levels are the highest.

BREAK DOWN BARRIERS

Sometimes seniors are not ready or willing to open up. Here are some hints for getting past their barriers and stimulating conversation.

- Ask for their advice...and don't give yours.
- Ask specific questions, yet don't interrogate. Routine questions, such as "*How are you doing?*", usually lead to automatic answers.
- Be a good listener and maintain eye contact. These are two ways you can communicate that you care.
- Listen for what they are not saying. This is especially important when dealing with the effects of illnesses and disabilities.
- For topics that are difficult for them to talk about, offer newspaper articles that will stimulate conversation or be seen as an authoritative point of view.

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