

Caregiver Corner

... Ideas and information for people caring for others 778-2411

Ten Tips for Communicating with a Person with Dementia

Good communication skills will also enhance your ability to handle the difficult behavior you may encounter as you care for a person with a dementia illness.

1. **Set a positive mood for interaction.** Your attitude and body language communicate your feelings and thoughts stronger than your words. Set a positive mood by speaking to your loved one in a pleasant and respectful manner. Use facial expressions, tone of voice and physical touch to help convey your message and show your feelings of affection.
2. **Get the person's attention.** Limit distractions and noise turn off the radio or TV, close the curtains or shut the door, or move to quieter surroundings. Before speaking, make sure you have her attention; address her by name, identify yourself. Get down to the persons level and maintain eye contact.
3. **State your message clearly.** Use simple words and sentences. Speak slowly, distinctly and in a reassuring tone. Refrain from raising your voice higher or louder; instead, pitch your voice lower. If they don't understand the first time, use the same wording to repeat your message or question. If they still don't understand, wait a few minutes and rephrase the question. Use the names of people and places instead of pronouns or abbreviations.
4. **Ask simple, answerable questions.** Ask one question at a time; those with yes or no answers work best. Refrain from asking open-ended questions or giving too many choices. For example, ask, "*Would you like to wear your white shirt or your blue shirt?*" Better still, show her the choices—visual prompts and cues also help clarify your question and can guide her response.
5. **Listen with your ears, eyes and heart.** Be patient in waiting for your loved one's reply. If she is struggling for an answer, it's okay to suggest words. Watch for nonverbal cues and body language, and respond appropriately.
6. **Break down activities into a series of steps.** This makes many tasks much more manageable. You can encourage your loved one to do what he can, gently remind him of steps he tends to forget, and assist with steps he's no longer able to accomplish on his own. Using visual cues, such as showing him with your hand where to place the dinner plate, can be very helpful.
7. **When the going gets tough, distract and redirect.** When your loved one becomes upset, try changing the subject or the environment. For example, ask him for help or suggest going for a walk. *It is important to connect with the person on a feeling level, before you redirect.* You might say, "*I see you're feeling sad - I'm sorry you're upset. Let's go get something to eat.*"
8. **Respond with affection and reassurance.** People with dementia often feel confused, anxious and unsure of themselves. Further,

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they often get reality confused and may recall things that never really occurred. *Avoid trying to convince them they are wrong.* Sometimes holding hands, touching, hugging and praise will get the person to respond when all else fails.

9. **Remember the good old days.** Remembering the past is often a soothing and affirming activity. Many people with dementia may not remember what happened 45 minutes ago, but they can clearly recall their lives 45 years earlier. Therefore, *avoid asking questions that rely on short-term memory,* such as asking the person what they had for lunch. Instead, try asking general questions about the person's distant past this information is more likely to be retained.

10. **Maintain your sense of humor.** *Use humor whenever possible, though not at the person's expense.* People with dementia tend to retain their social skills and are usually delighted to laugh along with you.

Adapted from an Article from the Family Caregiver Alliance webpage

Don't forget to check out local resources when you need help. The Alzheimer's Association is the premier organization for information about caregiving techniques for a person with dementia. Information on communication and behavioral symptoms can be found at www.alz.org.



Digital TV Transition to Occur

On February 17, 2009 all full power television stations functioning in the United States will stop broadcasting in analog form. People who do not have digital TV's will not have TV signals unless they have digital to analog converter box. The justification for this change is that digital television signals offer superior picture and

sound quality. Congress, understanding that this change may prove a hardship for people who own an older television set, has initiated a program that will offer two \$40 dollar coupons per household toward the purchase of converter boxes. More information on this consumer advisory is available on the National Telecommunications and Information Administration website at www.ntia.doc.gov.

To Request a coupon consumers can apply at www.atv2009.gov or there is a 24 hour hotline at 1-888-388-2009.

The above article was adapted from one found in Gene-Senior from Genesee County's Office for Aging.

Caregiver Chat



Announces Summer - Fall Line-up Benefits of Laughter and Folklore - July 7

Dorothy Gardner, the UHS Stay Healthy Senior Coordinator, will

share how laughter truly is the "best medicine" for caregivers and it's free! Not only does a good deep "belly laugh" benefit our minds but our bodies as well. Did you know that one minute of vigorous laughing is equal to ten minutes of exercise on a rowing machine? Dorothy will also discuss folklore from the 1500's and how it impacts us today. There are many expressions that we routinely use from that time in history; you'll be surprised to learn what they are!

The Caregiver Chat will meet **Monday, July 7th** from **1:00-3:00PM** at the **Stay Healthy Center** which is located in the Oakdale Mall near Sears.

Caregiver Services and its publication, **"Caregiver Corner"** are supported by a grant from the **New York State Office for the Aging.**

Caregivers,

Plan for the Year Ahead - August 4

The August Caregiver Chat will be an opportunity to simply chat and to plan for the coming year. Speaker topics for future Chats will be discussed, so come prepared to share ideas. These could be new topics, as well as ones that you would like to see revisited.

The Caregiver Chat will meet **Monday, August 4th** from **1-2:30PM** at the **Stay Healthy Center** which is located at the Oakdale Mall near Sears.

Learn Disaster Preparedness While Building Your Own First Aid Kit - September 8



In September, the Caregiver Chat will host Amber Bowers, Director of Health and Safety Services for the American Red Cross, Southern Tier Chapter. Amber will teach us how to "Be Red Cross Ready," a three step disaster preparedness training, customized for the specific needs of seniors. Come and learn how to help your older person prepare for the unexpected while building your own first aid kit (free!).

Please Note location change: In order to have sufficient room to assemble kits, **we will meet at the American Red Cross on Monday, September 8th from 1-3PM.** The Red Cross is located at **620 E. Main Street in Endicott.** Just a few blocks down from the Union-Endicott High School, on the same side of the street; parking is behind the Red Cross building.

Chat is an informal discussion group for people who are concerned about an older friend or relative. The group is coordinated by Judy Bobinski, Caregiver Services Case Manager. You are welcome to bring your lunch and a beverage with you and enjoy the company of other caregivers. Call Judy with questions at 778-2411.

Evening Discussion Group Breaks for Summer

There will be no Evening Discussion Group in July or August. The series will resume with a Legal Issues presentation in September. Look for details on that meeting in the September issue.

Workshops for Family Caregivers Available Online

Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA) is offering audio and video trainings to help family caregivers. Now the popular workshops offer caregivers the unique opportunity to learn practical care skills from expert instructors without leaving the comfort or convenience of their home or office. You can access the audio workshops at: www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/home.jsp. The workshops are currently listed in the What's New section in the middle of the page. Click on tele-caregiving workshop-audio archives.

Workshops available on-line:

- ⌘ Caring Together! Sharing Caregiving Responsibilities with Siblings and other Family Members
- ⌘ How Do You Know If You Have a Memory Problem?
- ⌘ Here but Not Here-Finding Hope When Your Loved One Has Memory Loss
- ⌘ Keeping Away the Caregiver Blues
- ⌘ Medications: Safe and Less Expensive Drug Therapy-A Caregiver's Role
- ⌘ There Must Be A Better Way Than This! Communicating with Someone with Dementia
- ⌘ Understanding and Treating Difficult Dementia Behaviors
- ⌘ Understanding Stroke and Vascular Dementia

Each title in the archive is available free, 24 hours a day, and includes an audio file and

companion written materials. Audio files are accessible in two formats: as an audio stream for instant online play or as a file download for saving to a portable media device.

Caregiver Toolkits and Resources

The Public Broadcast System has developed a new resource entitled, "The Caregiver's Handbook." The toolkit includes chapters on the Caregiver Path, Tips for Caregivers, Setting your Course, What older adults should know about Health Care Choices and Caring Conversations. The toolkit is available on the New York State Office for Aging webpage by clicking on the Caregiver icon.

Writing as a Caregiving Aid

Whether you are new to caregiving or have been at it for some time, whether the relationship is

loving or antagonistic, writing about the different aspects of your caregiving experience can be therapeutic. Caregivers deal with a tremendous amount of stress. Expressive or therapeutic writing can help relieve stress and often leads to resolution of nagging problems. Writing is an inexpensive way for caregivers to improve their circumstances and their health.

In addition to helping you free up your emotions, writing about caregiving can have medical benefits. Data show that when people write their deep thoughts and feelings about traumatic events, their heart rates slow, their bodies are better able to fight infection, and people feel a general sense of well-being.

Check local listings for writing classes or start a journal. For more information check out www.writingtoheal.com

Your July/August 2008 "Caregiver Corner"
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Broome County Office for Aging

...bringing seniors and services together