

## Communication Between Caregivers and Care Receivers

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Most people will admit that the biggest problems in relationships involve communication. Below are for caregivers to improve communication to avoid problems and improve the overall care of a parent, spouse or other care receiver.

### Top Ten Communication Tips Between Caregivers and Care Receivers

1. **Breath.** Take a couple of deep breaths before you start a conversation. If the conversation becomes emotional or difficult, stop and take another few deep breaths to help you calm down and focus.
2. **Really listen.** As someone once said: "There is a reason that we have two ears and one mouth." Listen to what the person says and check out what the person is hearing you say. For example, "Do you agree that we might want to call the nurse and talk to her about this problem with your medication?" Listen to silence. Silence allows someone to think about what is being discussed or about a response.
3. **Ask questions.** Find out what is really going on. Are you assuming some things about what the other person is saying because you think you know everything that is going on?
4. **Use body language to improve communication** (non-verbal cues in how you use eye contact, gestures, and your distance from the person). Look the person in the eye. Lean into the person or put a hand on the person's arm or shoulder but remember that not everyone likes to be touched.
5. **Slow down.** Take your time. Avoid trying to talk about and do everything at once. Communication at an even pace allows everyone to think through the conversation and how to respond
6. **Pay attention to what the person is saying and how they are behaving.** Do the words and the behavior match? Could the person be talking about something very different than what they really want but she does not know how to say it or ask for something? Be aware that fear may make someone hesitate to say what is really going on. Most care receivers fear admitting to certain problems and concerns that may lead to a further loss of independence.
7. **Talk directly at the person.** It may be easy for caregivers to 'multi-task' as they prepare meals, do laundry, take someone to the grocery store, or accompany a parent to a doctor appointment. Set aside time to have one on one conversation. This may save time in the long run because misunderstandings can be avoided. If the care receiver feels heard and understood she may talk about something that is a concern but felt that you were rushed. Identifying concerns and problem- solving can avoid problems later.
8. **Speak distinctly and clearly but not louder.** Some older adults do not like to admit that they may not hear and understand conversations around them. The higher pitch of many women's voices may be a problem for some older adults so women may need to consciously lower their voice.
9. **Avoid arguing.** Listen to concerns and try to understand the other's person's experience and opinions. Remember that it is still his or her life and care. Focus on meeting unmet needs and not conflict.
10. **Use humor when appropriate.** Humor can help ease tension. Most caregivers and care receivers know each other well enough to find humor in the situation.