Communication When Providing Care

When you talk to the person you are assisting, do they understand you? And do you understand them? No matter how difficult these challenges are, do not give up trying to understand and being understood. A few simple techniques can help.

Talking to Someone Who Is Hard of Hearing

Loss of hearing can make people seem slow or not interested. Often, however, they simply can’t hear what others are saying. They may not have their hearing aid turned up. To make sure you can be heard:

- **Stand, sit, or squat** so you are at eye level with the person.
- **Make sure your face is in the light** so that your lips and facial expressions can be seen.
- **Use simple sentences**. For example, “Do you want to eat?”
- **Use body language** such as nodding or pointing and lots of facial expressions.
- **Speak in a normal tone**, facing the person, and making eye contact. Do not shout.

Understanding Alzheimer’s Communication

Learning how to communicate with someone with Alzheimer’s is very important. These people have their own reality so do not try to reason with them. If you always remain calm, you can keep them calm too. The most important thing to remember is respond to their emotions—not to their behavior.

To improve your chances of being understood:

- **Reduce background noise.** (Loud noises can actually cause pain to someone with Alzheimer’s.)
- **Establish eye contact.** If the person is standing, stand; if the person is sitting, sit or squat down.
- **Address the person by name** and remind him or her of your name.
- **Explain what you are going to do** before you do it using one-step commands. Point to the object you are discussing. For example, say, “Do you want your slippers?” not “Do you want these?”
- **Avoid expressions that may cause confusion.** Don’t say, “Jump into bed.” Instead, say, “Get into bed.”

Before starting a conversation, announce what you are going to talk about. For example, say, “Betty, let’s talk about our trip to the doctor’s office.” When you change the subject, say so—for example, “Betty, now let’s talk about dinner.”
Encourage Cooperation

First, make sure he understands what you are asking. He may be confused, especially in cases of dementia, or he may be feeling ill and simply unable to respond quickly.

Make sure he is comfortable and not sick—He may be confused, over-stimulated, or in physical pain.

Be a listener—Take time to ask the person in your care how he is doing. Sometimes combative behavior is a symptom of a deeper issue. For example, a person may refuse to be bathed because he is feeling modest. Or he may refuse to eat in response to a sense of loss of control. Giving the person choices can make him more likely to cooperate.

Be patient—Your schedule may be overwhelming, but the person in your care is on his own schedule. Allow more time than usual for simple tasks. Too many activities at once can provoke a reaction because the person feels overwhelmed.

Remain calm. Seeing you calm may help calm him down.

When the person is upset, delay the personal care if possible. Can the task you are attempting be put off until the person is calmer?

Do not contradict his reality. Affirm his feelings. Say, “I see you are angry.” If he believes something to be true, do not disagree, unless it poses a physical threat.

Track the behavior. Keep notes on times of day, frequency, or type of behavior problem.

Tips on Changing What YOU Do

You may not be able to control the other person’s behavior, but you can control your own. Here’s how to appear less confrontational to the person who is agitated:

Stand to the side of him or at eye level rather than towering over him—especially if there are several people tending to him at once.

Don’t expect an immediate response. Allow extra time.

Keep the room calm. Turn off the TV and radio.

Speak clearly and slowly. Repeat softly what is necessary.

Handling Angry Outbursts or Uncooperative Behavior

First, try to diffuse the anger. There are several ways to do this. You will have to experiment to see what works best with the person in your care.

You can try:

Humor—Making light of the situation, but not the person.

Empathy—“I see how upset you are and I understand.”

Changing the Subject—Address what he is saying briefly and then move on to a different topic.

Take a Break—Tell the person you have a task to take care of in another room and that you’ll discuss the issue in a little while. This will give him time to cool down and you a chance to take some deep breaths to get centered again.

This publication is made possible through the support of the Johnson County Area Agency on Aging using Older Americans Act III-E Family Caregiver Support Funds. For more information, call (913) 715-8860.
Aging Information...913-715-8861

...Your Key to Aging Services in Johnson County

Johnson County Area Agency on Aging, through Human Services, offers a single point of entry for services. Aging Information Specialists are your starting point for locating resources such as in-home services, congregate and home-delivered meals, transportation, legal assistance, insurance, housing and more. In addition to phone assistance, you can receive resource directories, booklets and brochures via mail to further address your informational needs.

Johnson County Aging Information Specialists have voice mail to take your message when they are on another line. Please be sure to include your phone number when you leave a message. If you don’t hear back, please do not hesitate to call again.

Additional information may be requested when calling in a referral for department-provided services:

- Name, address and phone number of the person needing services
- Physician and phone number
- Emergency contact(s) and phone numbers
- Health information - important for assessing needs
- A Social Security number to keep multiple records in order
- Income and asset information to help determine appropriate services

After an initial intake, an in-home assessment will be arranged to gain further insights regarding needs and resources available.

Our philosophy is client centered. Agency staff visit and talk with each client before services begin. Each call or visit is handled in a confidential and timely manner.

We welcome your calls and the opportunity to assist with your needs.

Simply call (913) 715-8861
(If you reach a recording, please leave your name and phone number)

Visit our website at www.jocogov.org/hsd
Then click on Area Agency on Aging link at left.
Taking Care of Yourself — Changing Behaviors One Step at a Time

Sometimes we are not aware that our behaviors can affect other people’s behaviors.

To be able to make changes in our interactions with others, we must try to improve on our behaviors one step at a time. Try these simple steps:

- **Be generous with compliments.** Do not wait for others to do significant accomplishments before you give them a positive feedback. Say something nice whenever you catch them doing a good job, no matter how small.
- **Be generous with your smiles.** A smile can be encouraging for someone who is struggling to do some task and can foster self-esteem.
- **Do not allow yourself to nurture negative thoughts.** Try this trick: Wear a rubber band on your wrist for a week. Snap it against your wrist whenever you catch yourself thinking unkind thoughts.
- **Accept others for who they are and avoid being critical of them.**

Live Life Laughing!

Doctor, help! I swallowed a spoon!

Hold still and do not stir.

Inspiration

When you think you have exhausted all possibilities, remember this: you haven’t.
—Thomas Edison

Memory Care - When the Person in Your Care is Angry

Sometimes arguing, and refusing to follow directions are the behaviors that accompany Alzheimer’s. Other times, the person is frustrated by feeling sick or without control over many aspects of his life, and takes these frustrations out on those around him, especially the caregiver. Remember, he is upset about the situation, not you.
The Aging Network

As a result of 1973 amendments to the 1965 Older Americans Act, federal funding is provided for a network of agencies to coordinate services for the growing population of older Americans. This network includes the federal Administration for Community Living (ACL), state administrative units on aging, more than 655 nationwide Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), and thousands of community-based senior centers and nutrition sites.

The Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) is the state administrative unit that oversees the operation of 11 state AAAs. Although most AAAs are private, not-for-profit agencies operating in multiple counties, the Johnson County AAA is a public not-for-profit operating as a unit of Johnson County Human Services.

For detailed information, visit www.jocogov.org/hsd.

Aging and Disability Resource Center

The Area Agency on Aging hosts your local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), where people can turn for information, assistance, and a single point of entry to public long-term support programs and benefits. ADRCs provide unbiased, reliable information and options assistance to persons eligible for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) for Frail Elderly, Physical Disabilities and Traumatic Brain Injuries, as well as assessment services for persons considering a move to a nursing facility.

Receive services or be of service. Both are easy!

Begin receiving aging services. To learn more about any of the services provided through the Johnson County AAA, call an aging information specialist at 913-715-8861.

Become a volunteer. Consider joining the network of dedicated volunteers who help senior adults live in the Johnson County community with independence, dignity, and hope. Volunteers may choose activities that meet their interests and time schedules. The AAA’s priority volunteer program is Meals on Wheels. Call the coordinator of Volunteer Services at 913-715-8859 to learn more or to become a volunteer.

AAA Programs

- **Aging Information and Assistance.** Aging information specialists provide timely, updated facts about aging issues and services over the phone, through email, or in person by appointment.

- **Publications about Aging.** A variety of print and electronic materials provide important information of interest to senior adults and family caregivers.

- **The Best Times**, a quarterly newsmagazine, is available to Johnson County residents 60 and older. The Best Times provides vital information about aging services, programs, organizations, activities, and issues. The publication is also available online. Contact 913-715-8930 concerning subscriptions.

Area Agency on Aging

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AAA Programs

- **Caregiver Support.** Services to support non-paid caregivers of frail older adults who need services to maintain independent living.


- **Homemaker/chore programs.** Ongoing assistance with the upkeep and cleanliness of the home, shopping, and occasional heavy-duty cleaning are available through these programs.

- **Medication management.** Nurses visit private homes regularly to setup medications and monitor their use.

- **Assessment.** An in-home meeting with a potential client to determine needs for services. Additional assistance may be provided to coordinate multiple services if needed.

- **Nutrition Services.** Adults 60 and older in Johnson County have three dining options, based on their needs and preferences. Each meal provides a minimum of one-third of the daily nutritional requirements.

  **CHAMPSS:** A senior dining option to augment meals at Senior Nutrition Centers, CHAMPSS provides greater time flexibility and more extensive menu selections at local grocery stores. Call 913-715-8894 for information regarding enrollment.

  **Meals on Wheels:** Volunteers deliver nutritious meals Monday through Friday to senior adults who are homebound.

  **Senior Nutrition Centers:** Nutritious meals are served at 11:30 a.m. five days a week at six centers. The centers offer friendship, education, fitness, and opportunities for socializing.

  - **De Soto**
    - 32905 W. 84th St. 913-585-1762
  - **Gardner**
    - 128 E. Park St. 913-856-3471
  - **Lenexa**
    - 13425 Walnut St. 913-888-6141
  - **Merriam/Shawnee**
    - 6040 Slater St. 913-322-5550
  - **Olathe**
    - 1425 E College Way 913-782-6131
  - **Overland Park 8101**
    - Marty St. 913-826-3139
  - **Spring Hill**
    - 401 N. Madison St. 913-592-3180

- **Legal services.** Seniors receive access to legal consultation and representation, education, and assistance with access to government benefits.

- **Personal care.** Attendants help senior adults with bathing, grooming, and other personal care.

- **Respite care.** An in-home substitute caregiver or adult day care can provide temporary relief for non-paid caregivers.

- **A private pay care management service** is offered through the ADRC. This service assists those who need help in setting up services for seniors in Johnson County.
QUICK QUIZ

Whether with our own family, or in a professional caregiver relationship, we need skills to communicate effectively and safely. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Effective communication leads to mutual understanding and helps both parties find a solution to a problem.
   T F

2. Avoid expressions that may cause confusion. For example, don’t say, “Jump into bed.” Instead, say, “Get into bed.”
   T F

3. If a person is hard of hearing, he can understand you better if you shout.
   T F

4. Loud noises can actually cause pain to someone with Alzheimer’s.
   T F

5. Body language such as facial expressions and pointing can help make sure you can be heard.
   T F

6. It is important to respond to the person with Alzheimer’s emotions—not to their behavior.
   T F

7. Even if you remain calm, it will not help a person with Alzheimer’s remain calm.
   T F

8. In Alzheimer’s care, do not contradict his reality. Affirm his feelings. Say, “I see you are angry.” If he believes something to be true, do not disagree, unless it poses a physical threat.
   T F

9. Try to really hear their words and repeat back what they have said. This way, they know that you really heard what they said.
   T F

10. Stand, sit, or squat so you are at eye level with the person.
    T F

Name ____________________________ Date ____________________________


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Have you ever *acted* like you were listening to someone who was talking, but in reality you were thinking about what you were going to answer the other person when it’s your turn to talk or thinking about something else? Many of us are guilty of not *really* listening to what others say. Ways to improve listening skills:

- Try not to interrupt someone who is talking.
- Try to really hear their words and repeat back what they have said. This way, they know that you really *heard* what they said. (Then they might also be more willing to listen to you.)
- Avoid being defensive.
- Remember to show respect to the other person—even if you do not agree with his actions or words.

Effective communication leads to mutual understanding. It helps both parties find a solution to a problem. This means that your goal is not to win an argument or prove that you are right, but to reach an understanding.