



Tips for Communicating Effectively With an Elder

The normal physical changes of aging affect sight and hearing. Cognitive impairments, such as those caused by a stroke, dementia or other neurological conditions, also can alter a person's ability to communicate. It's important for caregivers to understand how to help when these changes take place.

Hearing Loss

You may have noticed an older person who has trouble hearing your conversations. Many older adults experience a gradual hearing loss that affects their knowledge of what's going on around them, as well as their safety.

- ✓ Help your elder get a professional hearing test.
- ✓ Help your elder get a properly fitted hearing aid from a professional, if necessary.
- ✓ Choose a quiet place to speak directly to your elder. Ask if speaking louder or slower helps him or her understand you better.

Reduced Sight

Changes in eyesight can be gradual or rapid. Since people use their eyes to gather information, the loss of sight can also change behavior. If you're caring for an elder with vision problems:

- ✓ Make sure eyeglass prescriptions are up-to-date.
- ✓ Get large-print reading materials.
- ✓ Try books on tape or other recorded materials.
- ✓ Give him or her a magnifying glass.
- ✓ Make sure rooms have adequate light.

Social Changes

Older people with vision and hearing problems may avoid other people.

- ✓ Encourage them to socialize with others.
- ✓ Let your elder know how much you care about his or her ideas, advice and company.
- ✓ Reassure your elder that others care about him or her.
- ✓ Explain the person's hearing and sight limitations to friends and family members.



Cognitive Impairments

People who have had strokes or those with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia may have trouble responding to normal conversation. If you take care of someone with such an impairment:

- ✓ Learn all you can about the person's condition from a healthcare provider.
- ✓ Be patient.
- ✓ Try to understand and accept the person's abilities.
- ✓ Be direct and use simple words.
- ✓ Comfort and reassure the person.