

Caregiver Communication

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How effective are you at communicating? How often do you feel as though you are just not being listened to or just not getting your message across?

We all know how important it is to be heard and to be able to communicate with one another. As a caregiver, good communication skills are vital. In any given week or month you will probably need to communicate with your family and friends, family doctor, specialists, care providers, pharmacist, and each day you will need to communicate with your care recipient.

Communicating is a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, of listening, and of body language. Let's take a closer look at communicating and some ways in which you can make yourself a better communicator.

One of the most effective ways to communicate in a positive way is by using "I" messages as they allow you to take ownership of what you are thinking and feeling. They increase your chances of being heard and can help keep conversations going in a positive direction rather than coming across as judging or blaming the person you are speaking to. "I" messages also help you exchange information and find solutions to problems.

Let's compare the more positive "I" message with the negative "You" message: "I really enjoy when we spend time together and wish we could do it more often." "You never come over to visit me anymore." "You" messages often lay blame at other people's feet and make them feel attacked, angry, and defensive. These types of messages never resolve problems or issues and often lead to the other person withdrawing even further. "You"

messages can even escalate into major confrontations. Let's look at one more example of an "I" message versus a "You" message. "Mom has two appointments this week and I cannot take any more time off, is there a way we can work this out?" "Since I am working you will need to arrange for Mom to get to her appointments this week."

Listen to the way you talk to others. Try rephrasing your messages and see what happens. It takes practice to break old habits

but it can be done, and I bet you will be surprised by the reaction you receive. Give it a try and see.

If we are honest with ourselves, we know that many times we are not actively present when others are talking to us. We are merely waiting for an opportunity to chime in and

talk about ourselves, or our own experience. However, if we want to be better communicators, we need to learn one of the most important communication skills of all: that of listening. There is nothing more powerful than truly listening to another person, being present and interested in what they want or need to share. We all know how good it feels to be heard and given the opportunity to share stories, information, or even advice from time to time. Listening, really listening, takes work and it takes time. The next time you are talking with someone try focusing on listening to everything the person is saying. Ask questions for clarification if needed, try not to interrupt or bring the story back to your own experience. Just listen.

Communication is most definitely a two-way street. If you want to be heard then you first need to listen.

"The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand, we listen to reply."

[Unknown]