



Communicating Effectively with the Elderly

As a person grows older, they experience changes in hearing, sight and cognitive ability. These changes can often make it difficult for the caregiver to communicate and engage with the elderly person. Below is a list of some common health impairments, as well as some helpful tips and techniques that can help build a better and stronger caring environment.

Hearing Problems

It may be possible that the elderly person is losing their hearing. He or she may be consistently asking you “What?” or not answering you at all. If this is the case, it is important for the elderly to be checked and for you to learn new ways of dealing their hearing loss. Below are some tips that will help you through this process:

- Ask the person to get a professional hearing test
- Take the person to get a hearing aid fitted
- Find a suitable, quiet environment to speak to the person
- Sit in front of the person and speak clearly, loudly and slowly

Vision Problems

Medical issues may affect the person’s eyesight. This loss can greatly impact their ability to function independently in many aspects of their lives. Additionally, this can be a taxing situation on their emotional health, leaving them feeling irritated or moody. Below are some tips on how you can approach this situation as the caregiver and help an elder person cope with their vision problems:

- Help him or her obtain glasses with the correct prescription
- Get large-print books and other large-print materials
- Keep magnifying glasses and reading glasses available in easy-to-find places
- Make sure the person has proper lighting
- Help the person read when necessary, such as directions and signs
- Talk to the person’s doctor about the impaired eyesight

Cognitive Problems

Various medical conditions, like strokes, Alzheimer’s disease and Dementia can affect an person’s ability to function on a daily basis. Seemingly simple activities may not be so simple for the person suffering with cognitive impairment. In addition, their regressing mental state can also be very challenging for the caregiver. Below are some tips that will help you accommodate their changing abilities:

- Understand how the condition affects the elderly person and the best ways to care for the person with that condition
- Be patient, comforting, reassuring and compassionate
- Use simple and clear language
- Refrain from expressing anger and frustration toward the impaired individual

Emotional Problems

If you or the elderly individual feel angry, resentful, depressed or irritated, this may inhibit healthy communication and relationships. Below are some tips to help communicate better when emotional problems are involved:

- Seek professional help and find a support group
- Don’t try to ignore the emotions; find healthy ways to deal with them
- Talk to trusted people about problems, and encourage the elderly person to talk about emotions
- Don’t make important decisions when upset — wait for a time when you are feeling calm
- Inquire with a health professional about medications that may help





Your Prescription for Lasting Happiness

Many people believe happiness is a feeling of pleasure based on some external happenings — you got the raise you wanted, you ate a fabulous meal.

“But true happiness isn’t contingent on circumstances; it’s a sense of contentment that exists independently of the good or ill fortune that might find you,” says M.J. Ryan, author of *365 Health and Happiness Boosters*. According to Ms. Ryan, you can be happier no matter who you are or what challenges you face by changing your attitudes and learning specific behaviors.

Happiness Keys

Try these suggestions:

- **Have something to look forward to.** We all need something pulling us into the future — a dream we want to make come true that gives us the incentive to get up in the morning. So, make a “want-to-do” list that includes things you wish to accomplish.
- **Realize life doesn’t have to be hard.** Many people can’t enjoy themselves and can’t let their guard down because they think that being extra vigilant will protect them. “But, you can’t prevent disaster by not being happy,” says Ms. Ryan. “Your life doesn’t have to be hard. It’s OK if it’s easy.”
- **Let go of desired outcomes.** So much of what happens to you is out of your control. All you can do is set your intentions and be willing to deal with whatever happens. Letting go of desired outcomes doesn’t mean you don’t work toward something; instead, it means if something doesn’t happen, you adjust to the opportunities life presents you. “Unfortunately, most people haven’t been taught how to do this,” says Ms. Ryan. “They get attached to a certain outcome and then are disappointed when events don’t turn out the way they hoped.”
- **Get a life.** A recent study found people who excel at work don’t put in longer hours than others. The overachievers often have a life outside of work, which makes them happier, more rested and, therefore, more efficient workers.
- **Ask for help.** No one can make it in life, at least not happily, on his or her own. Humans are social creatures, designed to give and receive support. “Ask for what you need today, and you’re more likely to receive it,” says Ms. Ryan.
- **Take a satisfaction break.** It’s easy to get so caught up in the rat race of your life that you don’t take time to appreciate your accomplishments. So, take a satisfaction break right now. Make a list of the accomplishments of which you’re the proudest — then ponder the list and appreciate yourself for all your hard work.
- **Envision what you want.** Each morning, before you start your day, use the power of visualization to create a day full of joy. See yourself handling the difficulties of your work life with equanimity. See yourself smiling at everyone you meet, treating each person with care and kindness. See yourself as the calm in the center of the storm of life. At the end of the day, notice how your day went. Were you happier as a result?
- **Do something you love today — if only for five minutes.** What gives you great pleasure that you haven’t experienced in a while: going to the movies and eating a bucket of popcorn or calling a friend long-distance? Whatever it is, give yourself permission to indulge today.
- **Notice what’s right.** Many people make themselves miserable by choosing to focus on what’s wrong in their lives instead of focusing on what’s right.” Acknowledging what’s working in your life or in each situation is the key to gratitude and happiness,” says Ms. Ryan.

