

“We don’t seem to understand one another. I keep trying to explain how I feel, but she doesn’t listen. We must make tough decisions, but we can’t communicate.”

Listen Carefully

Listening carefully is beneficial as family members make difficult decisions about the care of a dependent person. In stressful situations like caregiving, it is crucial to be attentive so you can hear what is said and understand what is intended.

Be Attentive

- Remove distractions. It is difficult to hear during a conversation when there is background noise.
- Listen to all the words. Stop talking so you can hear them.
- Accept what is said. Take time to listen to feelings and completely hear everything before agreeing or disagreeing.
- Wait. Silence allows the speaker to think and express his feelings.

As loss of vision and hearing occur, care receivers may become withdrawn. Careful listening lets them know you care about their ideas and enjoy their company.

I nearly always follow these habits to be attentive:

I need to work on these habits to be more attentive:

What does the person I am caring for want me to understand?

Listen for Hidden Messages

- Look at the speaker. Face him so he knows that you are paying attention.
- Consider nonverbal messages. Does the body language match the words you hear? Look for feelings.
- Listen with empathy. Put yourself in the care receiver’s shoes. The anger expressed toward you could really be anger about the illness.
- Do not pretend to listen. If you are busy, say so.

When I listen, I:

In order to listen better, I need to:

Check for Understanding

- Get all the facts.
- Do not interrupt. Ask questions to clarify what is said.
- Put the verbal and nonverbal information together.
- Repeat in your own words what you thought you heard.
- Avoid judging, criticizing, and giving solutions.

Listen carefully because clear communication involves more than hearing what is said. It involves interpreting what we hear.

I can improve understanding by:

What decisions must your family deal with now?

What future decisions do you anticipate?

For more information, read:

The Caregiver Helpbook: Powerful Tools for Caregiving- 2nd Edition by Vicki L. Schmall, Marilyn Cleland, & Marilyn Sturdevant, Legacy Caregiver Services, 2006.

Coping with a Difficult Older Parent: A Guide for Stressed-Out Children by Grace Lebow and Barbara Kane with Irwin Lebow, William Morrow, 1999.

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Caregiving Relationships: For People Who Care for Adults

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