

*"I am so tired. I don't know why they can't help.
After all, she is their mother too."*

Speak Clearly

When providing care for an adult, difficult decisions must be made and tough topics must be addressed.

It is necessary to express yourself clearly to professionals who provide services for the care receiver. It is also helpful to be able to speak clearly to the care receiver and other family members to provide the best care possible.

It becomes more difficult to communicate clearly with the intense feelings that often accompany caring for an adult family member. Watching a family member decline is difficult, and strong emotions may erupt. It can help reduce misunderstanding when everyone expresses those emotions with kindness.

These reminders will bring more positive results when speaking:

- Be specific. Listeners are not mind readers, yet you may often assume they know what you are thinking. Ask them if they need clarification.
- Stay focused. When strong emotions and issues from past relationships are brought into the discussion, you are more apt to say things you do not mean.
- Speak with tact. Be sensitive to the feelings of other family members. Speak for yourself only, beginning your statements with "I."

- Show respect. Say "thank you" and "please."
- Ban blaming, shaming, and put downs. Try not to accuse others. It will escalate into an argument. Insults do not solve problems or gain cooperation.
- Be honest. Be sure your actions match your words.
- If you must criticize, speak only of the issue at hand with kindness and respect. Be sure to include a compliment.
- Speak calmly and directly when responding to strong emotions.

Hearing and vision often decline as we age. Here are special considerations for speaking to older persons.

- Get an older person's attention before speaking to him. Call him by name and allow time for his attention to turn to you before speaking. This is especially important for the older person who has lost some hearing ability.
- Include older people in the conversation, looking directly at them. With loss of vision and hearing, it becomes more difficult to gather the information used to communicate.
- Lower the pitch and tone of your voice when speaking to someone with hearing loss. Shouting raises the pitch and makes it difficult to hear.

- Remove distractions. It is difficult for older persons to hear when there are other noises. Turn off the TV and radio. Limit speaking to one person at a time.
- Use short, simple sentences, speaking slowly and clearly.
- Use body language as you speak. As vision and hearing decline, older persons become more dependent on nonverbal communication

What do you want to say to the person for whom you are caring?

How can you improve how you speak to the person for whom you are caring?

For more information, read:

The Caregiver Helpbook: Powerful Tools for Caregiving- 2nd edition by Vicki L. Schmall, Marilyn Cleland, and Marilyn Sturdevant, et al. Legacy Caregiving Services, 2006.

Coping with Your 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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