

Better Communication

Communicating with an elder is often made more difficult by the changes that age brings in hearing, sight and cognitive ability. As a caregiver, you'll want to understand these changes so that you can tailor your efforts at communication accordingly. Remember: if you are having problems communicating with your elder, consider some of the physical impairments that may be causing these communication problems.

HEARING LOSS



If your elder has problems hearing you—constantly asking “what?” or not responding when you talk—you might be facing difficulties in having conversations. Since hearing loss often happens gradually, neither of you may be fully aware of the extent to which it is affecting your conversations. Here are some tips for dealing with hearing loss:

- Suggest that your elder get a professional hearing test.
- Help your elder to get a hearing aid fitted by a hearing specialist.
- Find a quiet place and time to have conversations.
- Speak directly to your elder, facing them.
- Speak loudly and slowly.

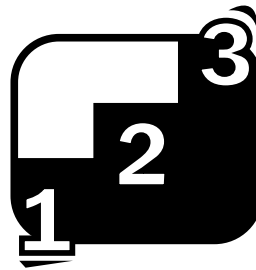
REDUCED VISION



Various medical conditions can cause either a gradual or a rapid loss of sight. This loss of sight can affect how an elder responds to his or her environment, and it can also affect their behavior and their moods. Here are some suggestions for improving communication with an elder with vision problems:

- Help the elder get up-to-date prescriptions for glasses.
- Get large-print books or other reading materials.
- Check out books-on-tape at the library.
- Offer a magnifying glass for reading.
- Make sure that rooms are well lit.
- Serve as the elder's eyes when necessary: read signs, instructions and other important information.
- Let professionals know that your elder has impaired eyesight.

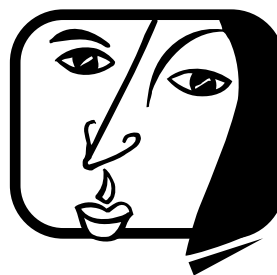
COGNITIVE PROBLEMS



Strokes, Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia can all impair an elder's cognitive abilities, making normal communication difficult or impossible. Here are some suggestions for communicating with an elder with cognitive impairments:

- Understand the causes and effects of the particular condition.
- Understand the best ways to respond to a person with that condition.
- Don't expect too much communication.
- Try to be patient.
- Write things down for them.
- Use simple words, phrases and sentences.
- Be direct.
- Be comforting and reassuring.
- Avoid expressing your anger or frustration.

EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS



Sometimes both the elderly parent and the caregiver can be suffering from emotional problems that may get in the way of effective communication, including depression, anger, resentment or frustration. Here are some tips for working around these problems:

- Seek professional help.
- Work on understanding the emotions and dealing directly with them.
- Talk over important problems with others who are feeling more levelheaded and rational.
- Try not to make important decisions while you are upset.
- Ask your doctor about medications that might help with the emotional problems.