

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Resolving Disputes—Communication When Providing Care

When someone has a chronic illness, you sometimes are called upon to help them make important life decisions before their illness or condition reaches the crisis stage. It is important to do this while the person in your care can still be involved—before he or she may be too sick to participate in the choices that impact his or her life. People often put off making important choices until it's too late because they don't know *how* to bring up difficult issues for discussion.



Bringing up Tough Issues

Available choices should:

- Be positive.
- Be stated accurately and be as informed as possible.
- Take into account important cultural, religious, or family values.
- Include key individuals' concerns.

How to Reach a Decision

First, be informed about the options. After assessing the situation, call community, hospital, legal or hospice resources to find out all of the possible options. Next, approach the family and the person in your care with those options and help guide them to a decision.

- **Present the decision to be made in new ways.** Sometimes people see a choice that is *difficult* as the wrong choice. Remind them it may be difficult, but not wrong, and there may be other choices.
- **Present the decision to everyone involved.** Don't leave out key family and health representatives.
- **Be sure the older adult is involved in the discussion.** The decisions affect her life most of all and you need to respect her dignity.
- If needed, **call in extra help** such as a geriatric care manager. Sometimes an expert or an additional go-between is needed.

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Handling Disagreements

Difficulty can arise when family members disagree with one another on what course of action to take. Here is how to handle those disagreements:

- **Find common ground.** Emphasize the ways that the family *does* agree.
- **Respect each other's opinions.**
- **Respect the right to remain silent.** Some family members will not want to express opinions or make decisions and that's okay too.

What is Your Role?

1. **To ask,** "Whose decision is it?"
2. **Be a translator or go-between** of people's opinions.
3. **Be an advocate.** You are on the same side as the person in your care.

Remember, the decision should respect the wishes of the person who is chronically ill.

Adapted with permission from a presentation by Mark A. Edinberg, PhD, psychologist and author of "Talking with Your Aging Parents."

For Effective Communication

Whether with our own family, or in a professional caregiver relationship, we need skills to communicate effectively.

1. **Assess the situation.** Listen to every member of the family to figure out what the issue really is. Look for meaning and emotions behind what is being said.
2. **Let them know you understand.** You can share their feelings without getting overwhelmed by their concerns.
3. **Try to be a reporter, not a judge.** Instead of saying, "It is wrong for you to smoke and you are hurting yourself," try, "I notice that you are having trouble breathing and it's getting worse from smoking."
4. **Maintain personal balance.** Allow yourself time to decompress and have a separate life with your own activities and down time. Find people you can confide in when you are puzzled or overwhelmed. Join a support group if you feel isolated.
5. **Avoid guilt, depression, and judgments.** You can grieve, feel frustrated or overwhelmed, and know these are normal feelings. Accept the tough outcomes and still feel good that you gave it your best.

Taking Care of Yourself—Keeping a Lid on Anger

When communication fails, stress levels go up. Higher stress is associated with heart attacks, high blood pressure, and more severe diabetes symptoms. Ask yourself these questions to help reduce stress and avoid anger triggers:

- ✓ **Is what I am arguing about really important?** Pick your battles and let the small stuff go.
- ✓ **Am I storing up resentments** from the past that are making things seem worse in this conversation? Stay on the topic—don't bring past issues into the current discussion.
- ✓ **Don't take it personally.** Be polite and keep your boundaries. You don't need to get angry just because you don't like what someone is saying.



Resource for You

National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys

www.naela.org

Search to find an elder law attorney in your area.

National Association of Geriatric Care Managers

www.caremanager.org

Provides a list of care managers in your state.

Live Life Laughing!

People say the world is full of apathy, but so what?



Inspiration

One definition of insanity is to believe that you can keep on doing what you've been doing and get different results.

Zig Ziglar

Don't Fall – Be Safe

When in public buildings, stay on carpeted runners. Many public buildings have marble or other surfaces that may become very slippery.

The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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Caregiver Series

available from...

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***SAFETY TIPS*—Getting There Safe & Sound**

Do you think that the person in your care may be a high risk driver? If driving seems it is no longer a safe way to get around, don't worry. There is a network of transportation services, public and private, that will pick up the disabled and the elderly at their homes.

Community transportation services may be provided by:

- ★ home health care agencies
- ★ religious organizations
- ★ the local American Red Cross
- ★ the Area Agency on Aging
- ★ local public transportation companies



NOTE

Many states require transportation to necessary medical care for Medicaid recipients. Check with your local Medicaid office to see if you qualify.

NEXT ISSUE...BACK CARE – SAFETY FIRST, DON'T GET HURT!