

Tips for Communicating with Your Aging Loved Ones

Have you found yourself worrying more about an aging family member? It's normal to feel concerned about your loved ones as they age. Although growing older can allow for a more relaxed lifestyle, it can also present new obstacles and challenges. Many times, it is the responsibility of a close friend or family member to see the warning signs and even initiate the difficult conversation with their loved one about getting help or seeking additional assistance around the home.

Studies have shown that adult children profess to be perfectly comfortable discussing assisted living with their parents, but in reality they hate to broach the topic.** Fear of embarrassing, insulting, or angering a loved one often keeps people from facilitating conversations about this uncomfortable topic. While the need to provide care for a loved one can strain family relationships, it can also make them stronger. Honest communication usually makes the difference.

At Premier Homecare of Indiana, we understand the importance of providing care and support for your loved ones. As a trusted homecare provider, Premier promotes independence and individual success. Use our communication checklist below for some suggestions on how to communicate effectively with your loved one about care and quality of life.

Eldercare: Tips for Communicating with Your Loved One*	
Questions to Ask:	Items to Consider
Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Any aging parent, relative, or loved one who may need assistance now or in the future. ✓ Include only people who your loved one trusts. ✓ Include only those people who are willing to help.
What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discuss your loved one's preferences and options for care. ✓ Talk about financial capabilities for each care option. ✓ Make all decisions together. ✓ Accept offers of help from other family members or friends. ✓ Confirm as time passes that preferences haven't changed. ✓ Be sure to follow through on your promises.
Where?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Open the discussion in a familiar environment, where everyone involved will feel comfortable and secure.
Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Having a plan of action before it needs to be implemented will make everyone feel more prepared when the unthinkable occurs.
When?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ It's better to talk sooner rather than later. ✓ Trust your instincts on when the time is right. ✓ Talk when all parties are open to the

When? (continued)	<p>discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Schedule the conversation, setting aside time when you can have the discussion without interruption. ✓ Begin discussions with your loved one about care and preferences before a crisis occurs. The hypothetical situation will be more comforting and create less tension. ✓ If it is unavoidable to talk about getting help before it is necessary: ✓ Educate yourself about your loved one's condition as soon as possible. ✓ Talk to your loved one immediately under these circumstances: ✓ If there are any noticeable changes in his or her memory. ✓ If there are visible changes in your loved one's physical appearance (i.e. weight gain or loss, wearing the same clothes daily, overall disheveled appearance). ✓ If your loved one feels sad or lonely all or most of the time. ✓ If he or she needs assistance when walking, climbing stairs, or getting in and out of bed. ✓ If your loved one needs assistance when dressing, bathing, etc. ✓ If he or she needs assistance with activities around the home (i.e. running errands, housekeeping, preparing meals). ✓ If your loved one's sleep patterns have changed (i.e. sleeping more or less than usual, disrupted sleep). ✓ If he or she has any changes in diet (i.e. overeating or lack of appetite).
How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Come prepared with an agenda and a list of tentative solutions for possible areas of concern. ✓ If both parties agree to it, consider having a third-party present to facilitate the conversation. Social workers and family counselors are a good option. ✓ Clear any tension in the room—maybe share a story about another family member or friend going through something similar. ✓ Be patient, honest, sincere, and a good listener. ✓ Show empathy for the situation (or impending situation). ✓ As you talk, have your loved one write his/her preferences down, or, if he/she are unable, do it for the person throughout the conversation.

How? (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Avoid making assumptions or decisions for your loved one. ✓ Pay attention to his or her body language. ✓ End the discussion promptly if arguing ensues or either party is too tired or angry to communicate effectively. ✓ Make a list and take an inventory of important documents, medical records, medications, etc. ✓ Make a list of emergency contacts to distribute to all necessary family members. ✓ Close the discussion by repeating back what you heard to confirm understanding. ✓ Follow-up with other family members who will be involved in care and decisions and debrief them on the conversation. Ensure understanding and coordinate a plan of action.
------------------	---

* The information that follows is presented for the purpose of educating the consumer on a variety of wellness and health care topics (the “Information”). Nothing contained is intended to be instructional for medical diagnosis or treatment. The Information contained is compiled from a variety of sources. The Information should not be considered complete and should not be used in place of a visit with, call to, consultation or advice from your Physician or other health care provider.

** <http://www.aarp.org/magazine/>