

Managing communications

One of the key things that a carer does is talk to people. This can include sharing with family and friends how things are going, communicating with the health care team, organising services and supports, and talking to the person needing care. We have brought together some tips for good communication.

Communication tips

Be clear about what you want to say. Sometimes it can be helpful to make some notes about what needs to be discussed or decided.

Remember that listening is a very important part of good communication. Pay attention to what the other person is saying.

Ask questions if you are not sure what the other person means. If the topic is very difficult for you, ask if you can think about it for a little while. But make sure you do return to the conversation.

You have a right to share your feelings. Be honest about how you feel and what you need.

Sometimes you might need to start the conversation several times. It's ok to say "Perhaps we could talk about this later, when I am not so tired."

When making a point try explaining the effect something has on you rather than blaming the other person. "I" messages such as "I feel that I am not doing enough when you say something like that" may be more helpful than saying "You are always rude to me".

It can be hard to ask for help if you have always been independent but family and friends want to help. Don't be afraid to ask for specific types of help such as asking for help with transport to appointments or to mow the lawn.

Important conversations

It can be hard to talk about difficult subjects such as finances, wills, advance care planning and funerals. These can be quite emotional and confronting for both of you. But preparing and resolving issues can reduce future stress.

Communicating with doctors and nurses

Many carers attend health appointments. This can be important in making sure that you are getting key information about care and the future.

Be sure the health care team understands your role and what you are able to do and what you cannot do in the caring role. Make sure they are aware of your other commitments such as work or young children.



Don't be afraid to ask questions. The Question Prompt List is a good way to make sure that you don't forget important questions. Make sure you write important information down. It is very easy to forget particularly if you are tired or stressed.

If you have looked for information on the internet, you may want to talk about what you found with the healthcare team.

If you and the person you are caring for are not certain what you want to do, ask if the decision needs to be made today. If not, ask if you can discuss it at the next appointment.

It can be helpful to have one family member as the main contact for the health care team. This person will need to be able to clearly communicate care information and decisions.

Think about where to have conversations. You should have the whole attention of the doctor or the nurse. Conversations should be held in a private place, not in a corridor or in the waiting room.

You can feel awkward talking about costs and money but it can be helpful to discuss the costs of care with the team, particularly if illness is causing financial problems.

Advocacy

Carers often have to speak out on behalf of the person they are caring for and represent their interests and needs. You may feel you need to develop your skills to do this. The following are some suggestions about how to manage this role:

- Understand as a carer and a health care consumer you have rights
- Identify what is the problem and what you would like to happen
- Find out who to speak to or what organisation is responsible for decisions
- There are support services that can help you such as Carers Australia
- Having a plan for discussion when you go to a meeting
- Be assertive. Make your points clearly and honestly. Listen carefully so that you can consider other views.
- Finally, remember you want to find a solution so negotiation can be important.

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www.carerhelp.com.au