

Geriatric Communication Tip Sheet

Improving Communication with Older Adults

- Do not assume a level of decreased mental function.
- Be aware and adapt to age related physical limitations and sensory deficits (sight, hearing, speech, reaction time)
- Secure the older adult's attention by eye contact or a gentle touch
- Identify yourself when greeting an older adult, and request information to assist in communication ('would you like your glasses?')
- Ask each individual what form of address is preferred (e.g. Mr. Peterson vs. Jack)
- Request permission to adjust the volume of television or radio or to change the amount or angle of light
- Use topic cues. Identify the topic at the beginning of the conversation.
- Listen patiently to the older adult. Rephrase or repeat what was said, and encourage the older adult to elaborate
- Watch facial expression and other non-verbal cues for understanding or misunderstanding.
- Do not pretend to understand an older adult's response. Request confirmation or clarification of a message you do not understand.
- Avoid speaking to older adults as if they were children.
- Do not ignore individuals or talk about them in the presence of others as if they were not there.
- Respect an older adult's routines and control of his life. Schedule and keep appointments at mutually agreed-on times.

Improving Communication with the Hearing Impaired

- Move closer for increased ease of hearing and seeing.
- Face the listener with non-glaring light on the speaker's face. Speak at eye level, facing the listener.
- Don't obscure your mouth to facilitate lip-reading.
- Signal before speaking to gain the listener's attention.
- Ask the listener what you can do to assist his / her hearing better.
- Assist in adjusting eyeglasses or hearing aids.
- Request permission to decrease background noise and music.
- Speak at a normal to slightly louder volume (but don't shout), slightly slower rate, and articulate clearly.
- Pause after key words; give the listener time to respond.
- Watch the movement of the listener's head to indicate an ear with better hearing.
- Be concise; listening requires great concentration.
- Identify topic and avoid sudden changes.
- Use gestures; rephrase rather than repeat missed statements.
- Use a notepad for messages if needed.

Improving Communication with the Visually Impaired

- Avoid startling an older adult.
- Avoiding positioning in glaring light, but provide enough to accommodate (may be up to 3 times what a younger person would require).
- Check condition of eyeglasses and request their use.
- Provide large print in high contrast colors (e.g. black print on yellow with 12-14 point type).
- Use tactile stimulation for cueing.
- Avoid moving personal belongings and discuss any changes in placement of furniture or belongings.
- Wait for the older adult's vision to adapt to changes in light.
- Reduce glare on surfaces including floors, bedside tables, and bathroom sinks.