



Communicating with Families

Families and Long-Term Care Residents

- Families may face a significant amount of stress
- Feelings of guilt
- Worry concerning the quality of care their loved one is receiving
- Worry if their relative will be unhappy with his/her new living environment
- Sadness about seeing their loved one's health decline

First Interactions with Families

- First interaction with a family will set the tone of your relationship with them
- Good communication is the foundation of trust and requires different skills that can be learned and improved upon over time
- When meeting a family member for the first time:
 - Introduce yourself
 - Explain who you are
 - Explain your role in the residents care

Communicating with Family Members

- Every time you communicate with family members:
 - Do your best to focus on their points of view
 - Ask how they feel things are going with the resident
 - Use active listening skills when they answer you
 - Show interest and concern

Building Trust Through Communication

- Sometimes family members are in denial about the true health status of the resident
- Changes happen slowly for residents, but become more pronounced over time
- You can only understand something is changing when you know what is normal for that person

Connecting with Families

- Start by introducing yourself and telling the family what your role is
- Be open-minded and try not to make assumptions
- Do your best to put family members at ease
- Be aware that this can be a difficult time for families
 - Treat the family with empathy and compassion

Positive Communication Skills

- Positive communication is the ability to convey messages, even negative ones, in a positive way
- Building relationships with families through positive communication will improve the living environment and enables better care
- Communication is a two-way process in which we share feelings, desires, thoughts, and attitudes

Positive Communication

- We are continually taking in cues from our environment and sending out messages through our:
 - Tone of voice
 - Facial expressions
 - Language
 - Gestures
 - Body position
 - Eye contact or avoiding eye contact

Key Steps

- Remember that communicating with family members is a unique opportunity to build trust and learn information about the resident
- Be aware of assumptions we make and be willing to see things in a different perspective
- A skilled communicator makes others feel valued by staying “in tune” to their signals, and by responding, or inquiring, in a nonjudgmental way

Communication Goes Both Ways

- It is equally important to become aware of the signals you send family members
- Pay attention:
 - To your comments
 - To your body language
 - Try to imagine how receptive and open you appear to others

Helpful Hints

- Use “I” messages instead of “you” messages, as they typically sound more positive
- Focus on how you feel rather than on what the other person did to upset or disappoint you
- Avoid using “always” or “never”

Working with Conflict

- It is important to always be polite and positive, and to do your best to address the family members' grievances
- If conflict arises, often the first best thing to do is take a slow, deep breath
- After calming yourself, begin by acknowledging the other person's feelings
- Try to get to the bottom of the underlying fears and concerns that sparked the anger

Working Towards a Conflict Solution

- Continue to acknowledge the person's point of view with showing concern and respect
- Imagine yourself in the other person's place
- Offer to help find a solution
- Ask the nurse, social worker, or supervisor to speak with the family member
- Never hesitate to call for help if the situation seems dangerous or there is a potential for violence

Summary

- By practicing positive communication skills, you can ensure that you have the best relationships possible with family members
- In every interaction, remember that you and the families share a common bond in your dedication to the resident's well-being

Reference

Cengage Learning. (2019). Communicating with families. *Nursing Assistant Monthly*, 23(1), 1-4.



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