

Communication Tips for Caregivers

Caregivers are tasked with constant communication between multiple parties. Here are some tips to help you stay informed and speak up on behalf of the person you're caring for.

One of the biggest tasks you may have as a caregiver is communicating. It may seem that you're talking non-stop with health care professionals, insurance companies, friends and family, and most importantly, the person for whom you're providing care. While communication can be time-consuming (and even frustrating) at times, it's also vitally important, so it makes sense to want to be the best communicator possible. The following easy-to-implement tips can help show you how to listen and share effectively and efficiently – and will hopefully make your life a little easier in the process.

Start with Listening

The best way to advocate on behalf of the friend or relative under your care is to be a good listener. Actively listen when they share ideas, feelings or concerns with you. Be patient with responses. If they aren't forthcoming with information, ask questions that elicit helpful, detailed responses.

For example:

- “Can you tell me about your energy level today?”
- “What would you like me to tell the nurse practitioner when she calls this afternoon?”
- “Let's talk about your appetite. How is it different than it was right after your surgery?”



COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

Take Note

Keep notes so that you can convey what you're hearing to others as needed — including doctors and family members.

You may prefer writing notes down in a binder or notebook, but consider using your smart phone to serve as your “personal assistant” when it comes to note-taking. Voice-recording apps (e.g., Transcribe or Speechnotes) let you speak notes into your phone where they can be saved as recordings or turned into transcripts.

You can also use an app like Google Keep to type notes and/or add photos of documents, and then upload those documents to your computer or share them with other members of your caregiving team.

The same holds true when you're listening to doctors or nurses. When you make a note of their assessments, you help the person you're caring for make better health care decisions.

Embrace Your Role as a Patient Advocate

For some people, speaking up is easy. For others, it doesn't come as naturally. Just remember that you need to advocate for the needs of the patient. Here are a few helpful tips for communicating with health professionals:

- Make sure the health providers are aware of your role as caregiver so that they know to share important information with you. You might need the person you're caring for to give their permission in order for you to have access to their health information.
- Speak up about appointment times that are inconvenient for your schedule. For example, you might tell a receptionist that late afternoon times won't work because you're juggling afterschool demands.
- Help ensure you get the full attention of your loved one's medical providers. If you don't feel you're receiving that, or wish to speak in private (rather than a busy hospital hallway, for example), request that the conversation be moved to somewhere quieter.

Navigate Family Communication with Care

Family members and close friends can help support you as a caregiver, but sometimes there can be communication headaches. An aunt might get bent out of shape if you don't call her daily with updates. A brother might disappoint you with his seeming disinterest in your mother's latest health struggle. Be clear and specific and speak as directly as you can about what you need.

Everyone's circumstances are different, but the following is an example of a clear and specific message to a family member (in this case, the aunt who wants daily phone updates) that has an honest yet respectful tone:

"I wish I could speak daily with all of Dad's relatives and provide updates individually, but I simply don't have the time to do that. My priority is taking care of Dad. However, I do send out emails every few days where I share how he's doing and also let people know what help we may need. Would you like to be on that email list?"

There are also resources like **CaringBridge** which let you update a page that family members can view for information.

Don't Forget to Listen to Yourself

While you're listening to everyone else, don't forget to listen to yourself, too. Try not to suppress your feelings. You're taking on an important role as a caregiver and you deserve to speak up and ask for help when you need it.

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