

Communication – Part 2

It's important to communicate effectively through active listening. Through our body language, encouraging words and even silence, we can help another person express their needs and feelings.

Effective communication requires that two people interact. If you are the speaker, you must say as clearly as possible what you think, feel or want. Make sure that what you say is understood by checking with the other person. Listen to their reply and talk about any differences between what was said and what was understood.

If you are the receiver, you must show that you are interested and are trying to understand what the other person is feeling and saying. Check that you have properly understood the speaker's message or feelings by explaining to them what you heard. Listen to their reply and talk about any differences between what was said and what was understood.

This action of clarifying what the person has said is called exploring. This helps to get to the root of a problem. For example, when a person says they are not feeling well, you need to ask more questions to find out what that really means.

Reminiscing about the past is also a type of exploring and is another way of helping a person express their feelings. It can help to talk about their losses and feel less alone. There are many ways to help a person talk about the past. You can encourage them to write to old friends or family members. Tape them talking about their memories and then play it back for them to hear. Look through albums and talk about the people and the events in the photographs. Help to organize memorabilia in a scrapbook. Start a family tree. It may be fun to cook favorite foods from familiar family recipes. Play recordings or watch films from times past.

How can you start the person reminiscing? You can ask them to tell you about their first job, car, trip, house or date. Ask how they met their spouse. What do they remember most about their childhood, early adulthood, Christmas or summer holidays? When the person begins to talk, allow them time to say how they felt and what they experienced without interrupting.

Touch is another important part of communication. It can be reassuring, show affection and indicate your presence. Just as infants who are not touched can fail to thrive, likewise touch is a need for older adults. Although each person's comfort level with touch does vary, most will enjoy a loving hug, holding hands or even a foot or hand massage.

Improve your communication technique by facing the person in a relaxed posture, nodding your head, telling the person to explain what they mean and acknowledging what you have heard. Then reap the rewards that come with learning to listen.