

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH NURSING HOME RESIDENTS

Non-Targeted Conversation

1. Some people may give answers that do not really relate to the question or comment you make. For example, when you say, "Mrs. Smith, I heard that you went for a ride yesterday," and Mrs. Smith answers, "Yes, I always lived there as a child."
2. Never laugh when a person does this. They will understand ridicule and disapproval.
3. Speaking about simple, concrete things helps. Compliment people on dress or hair and touch the things to make it more obvious. Talk about plants, items in the room, or the view out of the window. Touch and point to the things to draw attention to them.
4. Don't humor a person and play along with what they say. Say something realistic.

Forgetfulness

1. Some people are upset about their forgetfulness. Reassure them. Let them realize that you do not mind answering their questions.
2. Be patient when people say or ask things over and over again.
3. Sometimes you can remind people that we all forget things sometimes. Kid about your own forgetfulness.
4. Help a person by asking questions that are easy for them to answer. Some people may find it easier to remember and talk about things that happened long ago.

Things to Talk About

1. Listen and let the people talk.
2. Everyone is different. Some people will want to know all about you and the things you do.
3. Some people will want to talk about themselves.
4. People will enjoy feeling that they can help you learn or understand life. Let people tell you about the old days and help you understand history.
5. Old people were young once too. They got into trouble and played tricks on friends and had to go to school. They had boyfriends and girlfriends, went to parties and had fun. You can share stories with them.
6. Some people can remember things that happened long ago better than things that happened recently. Talking about the old days can be good for people.
7. When talking is difficult, doing something with or for a person can take the place of talking. Taking walks, playing checkers, having a cup of coffee or reading to someone can be good activities.

Special Problems

1. Calling out - Some people call out their needs because they don't think they get attention and help fast enough. If they don't ask you for something you cannot do, say you're sorry, you are not trained to do that, but you can tell the nursing staff.
2. Forgetting who you are - Each time you see the person, tell him who you are and why you are there. For example, "Good morning, Mr. Jones, I'm Cheryl. I talked to you last Sunday and said I would come to see you today."
Wear a name tag and point to it so people will see your name. This helps hard-of-hearing people and it helps people remember. People may remember your role better than your name. They may remember that you are a volunteer who went for a walk with them, but not your name.
3. Anger and hostility - Leave the person alone, but be sure he can't get hurt. Get help from a staff member who knows the resident.
4. Weeping and crying - Affection, such as patting a person on the back or taking a person's hand may help. Some people cry uncontrollably because of medical conditions and not because they are sad.
5. Asking for medications or other help - Never try to offer any kind of help you have not been trained to do. Trying to help a resident transfer from bed to chair can result in harm to the person or to you if done improperly. If someone asks you for help you can't give, say you haven't been trained to provide the help they need and are sorry you can't help them. Find someone on the nursing staff and ask them to go help the resident.
6. Names - Use Mr., Mrs., Dr., Rev., etc., unless the resident asks you to use another name. Names are very important in terms of self respect and self concept so you should be careful about the names you call older people.