

Caregiver Assistance News

“Caring for You - Caring for Others”

Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.

*Serving Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence,
Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties in Ohio*

www.aaa7.org **Helping You Age Better!**



APRIL 2021

Compassionate Communication Skills

A Better Relationship with the Person in Your Care

The stresses of caring for someone can create a buildup of tension, frustration and fatigue. Our conditioning sometimes tells us to blame someone or anyone for how we feel—it’s the “difficult” person in care, the “non-communicative family members” or the “inadequate” health care system. Blame can momentarily relieve some tension, but it also leads to other unpleasant feelings such as anger, resentment and disappointment.



Practicing compassionate communication like Nonviolent Communication (NVC) instead of blame can bring more understanding and deeper relief. Giving ourselves and others even a few moments of empathy in a difficult situation can increase safety, trust and mental health.

One way to have more empathy for ourselves and others when we are in emotional pain is to follow the “**Observation, Feelings, Needs and Requests**” model. Try this next time you have painful feelings, and notice if you experience a shift.

Observation - When you have uncomfortable feelings like anger, frustration or sadness, first make an observation about what is stimulating your pain. An observation has no judgment or evaluation in it. It’s something that is so factual that it could be captured by a video camera. For example, “Mary refused to eat her dinner tonight” is not an observation - there’s an evaluation there that Mary is “refusing” something, and that judgmental thought can lead us to feel frustration or resentment. An observation would be, “When I offered Mary her dinner, she did not eat it.” Observations help us get clarity about what really happened versus the story we are telling ourselves.

Feelings - Next, notice what feelings you are having about this event. Feelings arise in the body, as opposed to thoughts, which are in the head. They only happen inside us - for example, joy, fear, worry or grief. (Watch out for “false feelings,” which are things others are doing to us, like “unappreciated,” “insulted” or “unsupported”).

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Needs - Needs are values that are universal to all human beings - for example: justice, care, love, health, kindness, support, and cooperation. Sometimes one person isn't meeting our needs, but we can get the need met somewhere else, because meeting our basic human needs is important! The key is to remember that no one person is responsible for meeting our needs - we can get them met many ways. What are your needs that aren't being met in this painful situation? Make a list.

Requests - Next, try making a request. A compassionate request is specific and doable, and gives the other person involved choice. It is helpful to name our needs when we make the request. For example, "Mary, your health [need] is important to me. I'd like to offer you dinner again in an hour, and I would like to know if you'd be willing to try a few bites then [request]. I could use your support [another need] to make sure your body gets the nutrition it needs."

You can practice communicating compassionately with yourself, which is called self-empathy. Acknowledge your feelings and needs in a journal or in a few minutes of reflection. For example, "When Mary did not eat the dinner I offered her [observation], I sure felt frustrated and upset [feelings]. Some support and cooperation [needs] would be really wonderful."

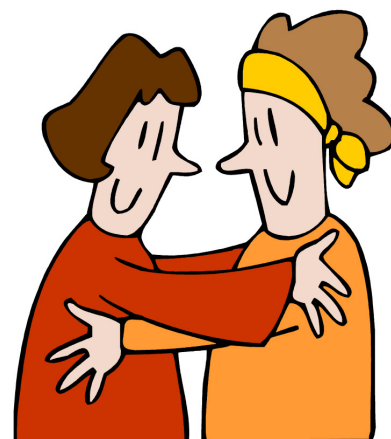
Compassionate communication doesn't "fix" some of the very difficult challenges and realities of being a caregiver, but it does lead to kindness, gentleness, and more resilience when we do this hard work. You might also try making an observation, feelings, needs and requests guess for the person in your care or in the care team to better understand them and feel more compassion and connection and less judgment. Empathetic compassionate communication is a practice that becomes more natural and automatic the more you do it. Try keeping a journal of your observations, feelings, needs and requests when difficult feelings arise, or find a buddy to practice with.

For more on compassionate communication in healthcare, see Mel Sears book, "Humanizing Health Care."

For more on Nonviolent Communication, see <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/learn-nonviolent-communication/nvc-healthcare/>

Communication is Not Just Speaking

As much as 90% of our communication is non-verbal. When the person in your care can no longer communicate with words, you can communicate that you care about them by the tone of your voice. A hug speaks more clearly than words. Music and dancing can also be a kind of communication. People with Alzheimer's Disease may be able to sing a song with you, even though they can no longer speak. Dancing together can communicate your affection for each other.



Taking Care of Yourself

Feelings and Needs

Think of a situation that is causing you some distress and make a list of the feelings and needs you have about it. Notice if you feel any relief after acknowledging you have these feelings and needs.



Some Basic Feelings We All Have:

Anger, annoyed, concerned, confused, disappointed, discouraged, distressed, embarrassed, frustrated, helpless, hopeless, impatient, irritated, lonely, nervous, overwhelmed, puzzled, reluctant, sad, uncomfortable.

Some Basic Needs We All Have:

Acceptance, appreciation, autonomy, celebration, choice, closeness, community, consideration, emotional and physical safety, food, fun, honesty, integrity, laughter, love, order, movement, respect, rest, support, trust, understanding.

Source: <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/learn-nonviolent-communication/feelings/>

HEAP
Home Energy
Assistance Program

Now open for applications for 2020-2021.
 This program can help eligible Ohioans manage their heating bills. Applications are available from your local Community Action Agency

If interested or if you have questions, contact your county Community Action Agency or the AAA7 Resource Center at 1-800-582-7277.

Telephone Caregiver Support Group
Thursday, April 15th
1:30 pm - 2:30 pm

If you are interested in this free support, please contact Vicki Woyan for more details.

Call: 1-800-582-7277, ext. 215
E-Mail: info@aaa7.org

FREE Telephone Wellness Classes this Spring!
 Chronic Pain Self-Management - Starting April 21st!
 Chronic Disease Self-Management - Starting May 6th!
You must pre-register at 1-800-582-7277 or info@aaa7.org. Classes for age 60 and over.

Memory Care

Before leaving someone, consider if they can recognize an emergency, such as a fire, and know how to call 911, or will the individual try to pursue former interests such as cooking or working with power tools.

Dental Care During COVID-19

Dental care is important for overall wellness. A study found that hospitalized COVID-19 patients with extreme gum disease were 22 times more likely to suffer from acute respiratory problems and to be placed on a ventilator.



As dental offices reopen, it is important that people return for their regular check-ups. It's especially important not to allow a toothache or other symptoms to get worse without seeing a dentist.

People should feel comfortable returning to the dental office, but if you or the person in your care are anxious about visiting a dental office during COVID-19, call and ask the receptionist questions to ensure that there are policies and protocols in place. These include protective gear, social distancing, and air filters.

For low-cost dental treatment programs, check with your dental office, university dental schools, or the local Area Agency on Aging.

Some content in this publication is excerpted from The Comfort of Home: Caregivers Series. It is for informational use and not health advice. It is not meant to replace medical care but to supplement it. The publisher assumes no liability with respect to the accuracy, completeness or application of information presented or the reader's misunderstanding of the text.



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Your local Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc. serves the following counties in Ohio: Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton. Services are rendered on a non-discriminatory basis. Those interested in learning more about the services provided through the Area Agency on Aging District 7 can call toll-free at 1-800-582-7277. Here, individuals can talk directly with a trained Resource Specialist who will assist them with information surrounding the programs and services that are available to best serve their needs.

The Agency can also be reached via e-mail at info@aaa7.org.