

Let's chat for a while

While family members get older, don't let the 'generation gap' get in the way of a great relationship. Here are some tips on communicating from an older person's perspective.



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e may walk a little slower as we age, but that doesn't mean we can't think for ourselves, make our own decisions or speak our minds.

But we realise that's easy to forget, especially now that we are living in a society where things are often done quickly and in a hurry. But in your busy schedule, don't relegate us to a more passive role. While many of us take a longer time to say or do something compared to our youthful days, we are still the same individuals capable of making decisions and knowing what is good for ourselves. And above all, remember that we still have our family's best interest at heart.

The key to communicating well with older folks is simple – respect, patience and sensitivity. Treat us the way you wish to be treated now or if you were old – and things will fall into place. Here's how:

Be respectful

- Be patient. Wait for our response. We may be slow, but we can speak for ourselves.
- Treat us with respect, not as little children unable to think for ourselves.
- Include us in as much family decision-making as possible.
- Acknowledge our strengths and contributions. Encourage and support us in being self-reliant.
- Remember, we are unique individuals with dignity and self-worth – just like you.

React with emotion

- Communicate your feelings and understanding through eye contact, touch and facial expression.
- Like you, we also have the right – and need – to express our feelings and have it respected – even negative ones. Hear us out and if necessary, probe us a little more to find out how we really feel.
- Never underestimate the power of touch. Physical contact – from a casual touch to a warm hug – communicates acceptance, care and concern. We thrive on that.
- Some of us may be more traditional and may not express our feelings readily. Focus on our speech and body language to find clues to our thoughts and feelings.

Be tolerant

- Accept our limitations, and be encouraging at the same time. It will go a long way in boosting our self-esteem.
- Criticising our behaviour is easy, but it does not help.

Chat!

- Speak clearly and concisely.
- Encourage lively conversation. There's plenty we can chat about – tell us about yourself and your life, the local and world news, talk about the details of daily life, let's share our views on current affairs.
- Focus on the positive – keep conversations happy and ignore, if possible, any faults or failings.

Listen!

- Perhaps the most important of all, stop talking and start listening! The key to good communication lies in listening well! And yes, that often goes both ways. ♥

For the hearing impaired:

Some of us may have difficulty hearing in our old age. Here are some tips on dealing with it:

- ❖ Approach us from the front. Stand directly in front of us while you're talking to us.
- ❖ Speak slowly and clearly. DON'T SHOUT.
- ❖ Use non-verbal communication as well, such as pointing or gesturing.
- ❖ Write things down, especially important information, if necessary.
- ❖ Find the 'good' ear and talk into it.
- ❖ Encourage the use of a hearing aid. Check the battery often.

For the visually impaired:

- ❖ Approach from the front to avoid startling us.
- ❖ Encourage us to use our glasses and keep them clean.