

THE ART OF COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

- **Eliminate distractions** (e.g., TV, radio).
- **Turn off your cell phone and pagers.** Oftentimes the elderly do not understand these new technical devices and will feel like they are playing second fiddle to a piece of equipment. They may make them shut down and not be willing to communicate with you at all.
- Speak to the individual in a **clear, warm and pleasant manner.**
- **Approach the person from the front.** Lower your body to their level and look directly at the person when communicating. Establish and maintain eye contact. You may be able to read their eyes for signs of frustration, distress or anger.
- Make use of **comforting gestures:** touching a hand or back, pointing to an object or handing and object to the person.
- Show a **pleasant smile** and show affection where appropriate.
- The **tone of your voice** has more impact than your message, especially when communicating with someone with Alzheimer's disease.
- **Avoid long complex sentences.** Ask one question or give one instruction at a time. Wait until the first instruction is processed before delivering the next. A single task may need to be broken down into several steps. Repeat messages using the **same wording.** Paraphrase repeated messages. Use **"yes/no" rather than "open-ended" questions** if you notice they are experiencing difficulty communicating.
- **Avoid interrupting** the person; allow plenty of time to respond.
- **Be patient when listening.**
- Respond to the feeling content of message. Recognizing their feelings and **offer reassurance.** Even if you can't fix the problem you can provide comfort.
- Always treat an aging person with **dignity and respect.** Do not call older adults "Honey," "Pops," "Sweetie," etc. unless that is what they prefer to be called. Follow their preference. Everyone likes to hear their own name.
- Do not talk about an aging person in the presence of others as if they were not there. Even patients with Alzheimer's or dementia can understand and be humiliated or embarrassed.
- **Respect an aging person's background, knowledge, and values.**