

Positive Talk

*What to say – and what not to say
– when speaking with residents,
clients and their families*



Positive Talk is intended to help you communicate more effectively with residents, clients and their families. The module highlights some common communication scenarios that occur when speaking with families, residents and clients, and provides several examples of appropriate and inappropriate responses. It also touches upon the importance of positive communication in everything we do and offers some basic communication techniques you can follow.



Communicating with family members

At Carewest, the relationship you have with the families of our residents and clients is often as important as the one you have with those you care for. As part of your role, it is important that family members feel welcome in our care centres and are treated just as you would expect to be treated: with kindness, respect and dignity.

Being aware of how you communicate with family members can help ensure that those relationships remain positive and constructive.

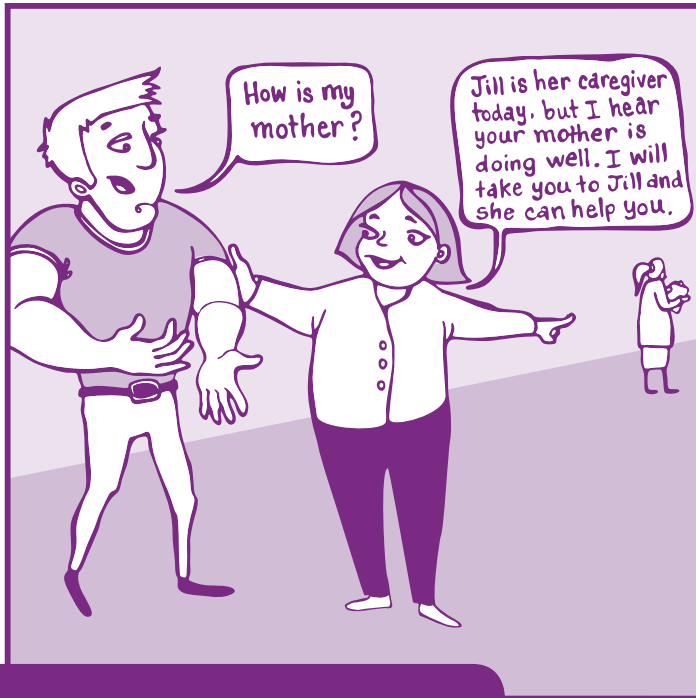
You may feel defensive when families approach you with a question about their loved one. Understand that your feelings toward a family member may affect how you feel about the resident or client – this is normal. However, it's important to always act in a professional, courteous manner, regardless of how you feel toward the family member, resident or client.

It's also important to remember that interacting with caregiving staff can sometimes be stressful for families who may be hesitant to 'make waves'. They may be afraid that complaining to staff will mean staff will treat their relative poorly. A natural role for family members is to act as an advocate for their loved one and they should be encouraged to be involved in their care.

The following scenarios highlight some of the common situations that can occur when interacting with family members, what to say in those situations and what not to say.

1. Scenario

A family member walks into the care centre or onto the unit and asks "How's my mother?"



Appropriate response

If you are her caregiver, answer the question.
If you are not her caregiver, escort them to the correct person:

"Jill is her caregiver today, but I hear your mother is doing well. I'll take you to Jill and she can help you."

Inappropriate responses

"I don't know."

"She's not my resident."

"I'm on my break."

"I've been off the last two days."

2. Scenario

A family member is upset that their mother's hair appointment has not been booked.



Appropriate response

Apologize for the inconvenience, and if you don't know why the appointment wasn't booked, find out and remedy the situation:

"I'm sorry, I'm not sure why that is. Let me find out and I'll get back to you right away."

Inappropriate responses

"It's not my fault, we're short-staffed."

"How would I know?"

"That's not my job."

"I don't make the appointments.

Ask someone else."

3. Scenario

A family member wants to know what their father ate that day.



Appropriate response

If you don't know the answer, then find out and relay the information to the family member or escort them to the person who does know the answer:

"I'm sorry, I don't know what your father ate today, but I know who can tell you. Let me take you to them."

Inappropriate responses

"I don't work in the dining room."

"How would I know?"

"He's not my resident."

"I'm on my break."

4. Scenario

A family member sees a bruise on their mother's hand. They want to know what happened and why they weren't notified.



Appropriate response

If you don't know the answer, have the family member wait in the room and then find the appropriate LPN or RN who can come and speak with them:

"I'm not sure why that is but I'll find out. Please have a seat while I get someone who can help you."

Inappropriate responses

"It doesn't look like anything to me."

"I don't know."

"I'm on my break."

"I didn't see any bruising."

Other common questions

“My father’s favourite sweater is missing. Do you know where it is?”

“Why wasn’t my mother changed? Why wasn’t my father shaved?”

“Has the doctor been in?”

“Has my mother been given her medication?”

Tips for answering questions

- If you do know the answer, then take the time and speak to the family member.
- If you don’t know the answer, find someone who does.
- Don’t respond to their question with another question: “Why do you want to know? Why does it matter?”
- Be proactive. If you see a family member, approach them, say hello, introduce yourself, and shake their hand: “Hello, my name is Anne. I’m your father’s caregiver today.”



Communicating with Residents and Clients

At Carewest, we provide care to our residents and clients. However, we're also in the customer service business. Just as family members are our customers, so too are our residents and clients and it's important that we treat them that way – with kindness, respect and dignity.

The following scenarios highlight some of the common situations that can occur when caring for a resident or client, what to say in those situations, and what not to say.

5. Scenario

A resident or client wants to argue, is yelling, or is difficult to deal with at that moment.



Appropriate response

Explain to them that you are going to remove yourself from the situation and come back later. Do not argue with the resident or client:

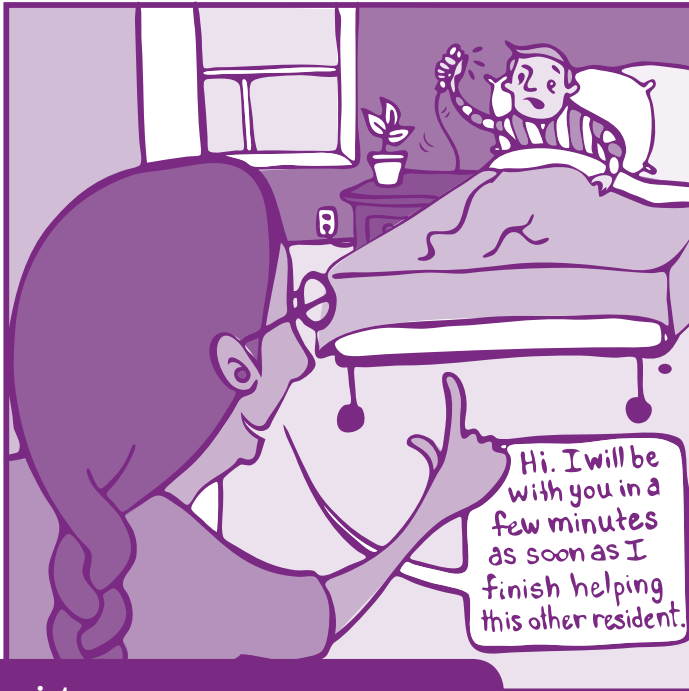
"I don't think we're quite ready for this activity right now. Why don't I come back in a little while?"

Inappropriate responses

- Yelling
- Arguing with the client
- Storming out or leaving without explanation

6. Scenario

A resident or client keeps ringing the call bell.



Appropriate response

If you don't have time to address their concerns immediately, go to the room and acknowledge that you have heard the bell and that you will be back to help them soon:

"Hi. I will be with you in a few minutes as soon as I finish helping this other resident."

Inappropriate responses

- Telling them to stop ringing the call bell
- Scolding them
- Ignoring them

7. Scenario

A resident or client is trying to get into a locked or restricted area.



Appropriate response

Speak to the resident or client and ask them how you can help. If they have dementia, bring their attention to something else, walk with them to get a cup of coffee or talk to them about something other than where they're going:

"Can I help you? What is it you're trying to find? That door seems to be locked. Where would you like to go? Let me help you with that. I'll take you there."

Inappropriate response

Yelling at them or telling them where they can't be: "You can't go in there. You're not allowed here. Why are you trying to open that door?"

Inappropriate ways to communicate

Sometimes we don't speak to or address our residents and clients in the most respectful manner. Residents and clients should be treated in the way we would like to be treated, or the way we would like our mother or father to be treated. Here are some common pitfalls you should be aware of when addressing a resident or client.

Examples of what not to say:

- "I wasn't on last night."
- "That's not my job."
- "No one told me anything."
- "This is not my unit; I'm new to this unit."
- "I'm busy, ask someone else."
- "I don't know what you're talking about."

Avoid:

- Always saying no.
- Calling the resident or client inappropriate names, including granny, sweetie, dear, etc. Ask them or their family member what the appropriate way to address them is and what they would like to be called (such as Joe, Mrs. Smith or Dr. Brown).
- Making light or cracking jokes about a resident's or client's ailment or disability.
- Swearing.
- Yelling at residents or clients.
- Scolding residents or clients by saying things like "Don't talk to me like that! Who do you think you are? I'm not your servant!"

Positive Body Language

How we say something is as important as what we say. In fact, more than 50 per cent of how we communicate with each other is non-verbal. Therefore, it is important that we are aware of our body language.

Do:

- Listen attentively
- Make eye contact
- Shake hands (if appropriate)
- Wear nametags and bring attention to them
- Uncross your arms
- Smile

Also remember to:

- Say what you can do instead of what you can't do.
- Be kind and polite in your approaches and responses.
- Seek help if you don't know the answer.





In support of our Carewest Frame of Reference,
our Philosophy of Care is:

**“To provide our residents and clients with
quality care in safe, comfortable and
supportive environments.”**

The Guiding Principles to the Philosophy include working together to:

- Preserve and promote **dignity** through respectful, individualized approaches to care;
- Provide **kind** and **compassionate** care and service;
- Foster **supportive relationships** between all staff, clients, families and communities;
- Foster an environment of **learning** to promote excellence in care and service.



© Carewest February 2016