

Positive Talk

A resource for Carewest residents,
clients and their families



Positive Talk is a Carewest-developed series of booklets intended to help you communicate effectively and positively with the people around you. Moving into a care environment can be a difficult time for you and your family and our goal is to help you throughout that transition. You are an important part of the care team and our intention is to help you take full advantage of the relationships you will form with our employees. This booklet highlights some common communication scenarios that can occur when speaking with the people who care for you or your loved ones – our employees. It provides several examples of different situations you may encounter at our care centres and touches upon the importance of open, positive communication in everything we do. Lastly, this booklet offers some basic communication techniques you can follow that may contribute to more positive interactions with Carewest staff.



Residents and Clients

Communicating with our staff

At Carewest, we strive to ensure the relationships we have with you – our residents and clients – and your families remain positive and constructive. We understand you may be going through a difficult time of change and we hope to help make that transition a little easier.

There are many different occupations working within our care centres, and we all work towards a common goal – striving to provide safe and excellent care for you, and supportive relationships with families and significant others.

We consider you, our residents, clients and your families, an important part of the health care team and recognize we have to work together to offer the safest and best care possible.

Often times in a health care setting, situations may arise that require you to ask questions, offer suggestions and make decisions regarding your care.

Being aware of how you communicate with staff about your care can make all the difference in ensuring we are working effectively towards our common goals and building solid care partnerships.

You can use this booklet whether you want a reference while handling certain types of situations that may arise, or whether you are just curious about what kind of communication styles work best to communicate within these types of scenarios.

The following pages highlight some of the common situations that can occur in our care centres, and offer suggestions about maintaining positive and constructive relationships.

1. Scenario

Working together

Debbie just moved into a care centre and needed assistance from staff when transferring from her wheelchair to her bed. This assistance was scheduled in the early evening, creating a bedtime for Debbie that she felt was too early. So she worked together with staff to learn how to transfer herself safely into bed.



Helpful approaches

Remember, you are an important part of the health care team. If there is something you would like to change about the care you are receiving, there are ways to work on that. You have a voice and if you express your wishes, you can control aspects of your care that are most important to you.

"It's okay! I worked with staff to learn how to safely transfer myself, so I can go to bed whenever I like. You can stay if you want to."

Try to avoid

- Telling your friend the staff force you to go to bed early
- Choosing not to discuss your concerns with anyone
- Blaming staff

2. Scenario

Missing laundry

A resident is delivered her bag of freshly laundered clothes when she realizes her favourite sweater is missing. She asks her nurse about the sweater.



Helpful approaches

At Carewest, we do our best to care for your clothing but sometimes things go missing, as in any household. Whether you are labeling your clothing yourself or having it done for you, it's important that's done as soon as possible after you arrive. Since many Carewest sites contract out the laundry service, a missing article of clothing might remain a mystery even if staff help look for it. It's important to realize that staff are doing all they can to help you, even if they cannot find the missing clothing.

"I may have forgotten to have that sweater labeled. Please ask your laundry service to look for it regardless but I won't hold on to hope that it will be found."

Try to avoid

- Telling people you are receiving poor care
- Refusing to have your clothes washed in the future
- Being disrespectful to staff

3. Scenario

Personal Hygiene

A resident, who is new to the care centre, is concerned about how often he is bathed during the week. He asks a health care aide if it would be possible to be bathed more frequently.



Helpful approaches

We're committed to maintaining your personal hygiene. We have many bathing options. There are showers, baths and bed baths among others – all of which we provide as required.

Try to avoid

- Trying to take a shower yourself, which may create an unsafe situation
- Arguing with staff
- Complaining that you are receiving poor care

4. Scenario

Incontinence

Losing control of bodily functions can be very difficult and Mrs. Jones is embarrassed to have to use a continence product. She often asks to be taken to the washroom – a request that staff always try to accommodate as quickly as possible.



Helpful approaches

Sometimes, being willing to understand the multiple demands placed on staff is a necessary part of helping everyone support your care plan. A little understanding goes a long way. But there is also nothing wrong with establishing urgency in the situation by politely asking staff to hurry.

"I understand you're busy. But please hurry."

Try to avoid

- Blaming staff
- Losing your temper
- Complaining that you are receiving poor care

Other common scenarios

When you encounter difficulty or need assistance, always ask for help when you need it.

Don't be afraid to recognize your caregiver for a job well done. A thank-you and a smile go a long way.

When others are trying to solve a problem, never assign blame or make assumptions about them.

It's difficult having a roommate or other residents coming into your room. Patience and consideration is required by both parties, especially if one of those parties has dementia.

To improve communication, please choose one family member to be your spokesperson and to receive personal information about your care. Please make that decision known to staff.

Tips to help you stay positive

- Try focusing on the positive. Instead of saying, "I'm not happy about this," "I don't like that idea," and "I don't believe you," try saying, "I'd rather see," "Let's try this," and "This is what I understand to have happened."
- If you are stuck on a problem, find someone who can help.
- Treat everyone with respect – the way you would like to be treated.

Your families

Communicating with our staff

If you have been caring for your loved one prior to them moving in to a long-term or assisted-living setting, you may have developed great methodology and routines that work well for you and your family member.

Our policies and procedures reflect our commitment to safety and excellence in continuing care. However, there's no place like home and a facility environment can never take its place.

Having a loved one move into a care environment can be stressful and trusting others to care for your loved one to your expectations can also be difficult.

At Carewest, we understand that no matter how long we've been caring for your loved one, you always know that person best – their likes, dislikes and habits.

Family members are a very important part of the care team and you are encouraged to become involved in the care centre in which your loved one resides.

That involvement may require you to ask questions, make decisions and offer suggestions regarding the care of your loved one.

Being aware of how you communicate with staff about the care of your loved one can make all the difference to ensure we are working effectively towards our goal of providing excellent care for our residents and clients.

The following scenarios highlight some of the common situations that can occur everyday in our care centres, and offer suggestions about maintaining positive and constructive relationships.



5. Scenario

Communication

Mr. Smith is hard of hearing and a staff member has to speak loudly in order to communicate with him. Mr. Smith felt he was being yelled at and would often tell that to his daughter.



Helpful approaches

You have acknowledged your father's concerns and brought them to the attention of the care staff. It does take awhile to establish effective communication strategies from person to person and we appreciate you speaking up for your dad. You know your father is hard of hearing and it makes communicating a little more difficult. You've been proactive in addressing the situation with your father and with staff. You may suggest to staff that they try to lean in closely when speaking with your father and to make sure their facial expressions and tone of voice remain friendly.

"I've spoken to the nurse to make sure they know that you're uncomfortable. They told me that they will lower their voice when talking to you from now on."

Try to avoid

- Agreeing with your dad that the staff are yelling at him without first investigating his concern
- Not saying anything to staff about the problem

6. Scenario

Multiculturalism

Your grandmother is uncomfortable interacting with people of a culture different than her own. She would often become upset when anyone with a different look or cultural background would try to care for her.



Helpful approaches

Carewest has more than 2,700 employees – who all are highly qualified with the best interests of your loved one in mind. Reassure your loved one that our staff are all very qualified. She may even learn to overcome those fears, in time. Carewest has an obligation to provide an environment of mutual respect for all staff, volunteers, residents, clients and families. If this continues to be an issue, arrange a meeting with the manager.

“I’m sorry you feel that way Grandma. Carewest has a culturally diverse staff and you cannot pick and choose who cares for you. This staff member is very qualified and will provide great care for you.”

Try to avoid

- Being disrespectful to staff
- Threatening staff
- Refusing to acknowledge staff because of their race

7. Scenario

Being honest with your caregiver

Your father has been a Carewest client for a few months. During that time, you've noticed that he receives great care while particular staff members are working a shift but you've realized you aren't happy with his care while other staff members are working.



Helpful approaches

A small gesture of thanks goes a long way. Taking the time to meet the caregivers in your loved one's life or thanking them for their care will speak volumes. Alternatively, if you aren't happy with an aspect of your father's care, speak up. Address the caregiver directly and tell that person there's an aspect of your father's care you'd like to change. If there is a real issue, speak to the staff nurse.

"By the way, I notice my dad is a little more incontinent these days. Could you please take him to the bathroom a little more often?"

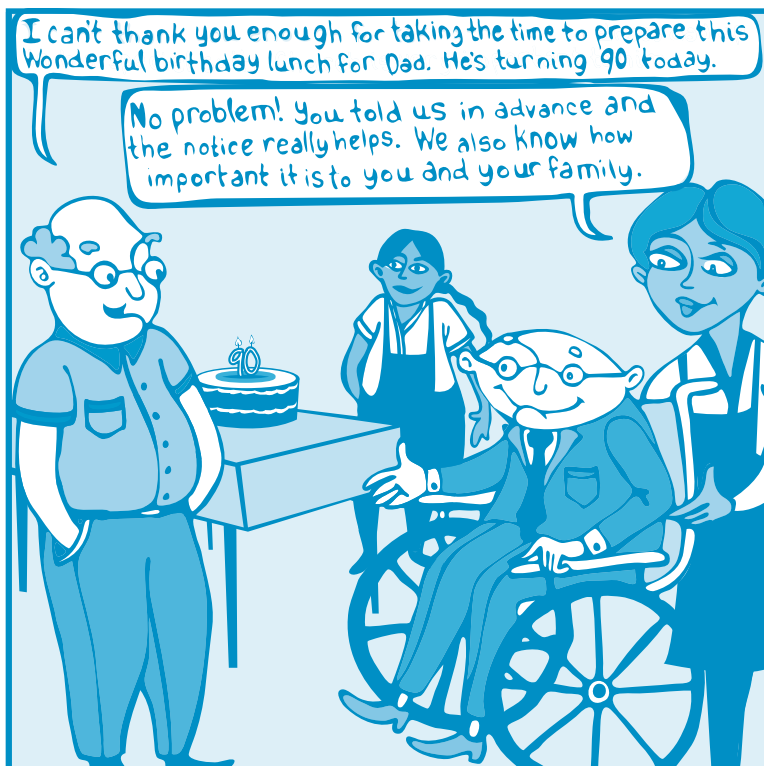
Try to avoid

- Ignoring the caregiver
- Criticizing one caregiver to another
- Refusing to address the issue
- Not acknowledging their job well done

8. Scenario

Special requests

Two staff members are helping set the table for a resident's birthday lunch. His son has just arrived to help him celebrate.



Helpful approaches

Carewest staff are often very responsive if you are proactive and give enough notice to do something special for your loved one. This family member made sure to tell staff in advance that he'd like to help his father celebrate his birthday with a special lunch.

Try to avoid

- Not giving advance notice for the request
- Not understanding that some special requests can't be accommodated
- Not understanding time constraints of staff

9. Scenario

Keeping in touch

A family member, who is visiting his mother with a friend, wonders if a question about his mother's night has been answered in the communication book they have been using.



Helpful approaches

Instead of trying to round up answers about his mother's evening care by asking day staff, this family member decided to start communicating with the night staff through a book he brought in. If he has any questions about his mom's care, he will write it into the communication book and leave it open for night staff to see. When he comes in the next day, he checks for their responses. If the information is confidential in nature, it will not be put in the communication book. The nurse may invite him to discuss it with her privately.

"My mother's memory isn't what it used to be, so I've starting communicating with staff through this communication book I bought. Look here - I asked about my mom's night and her nurse wrote me a note."

Try to avoid

- Citing staff indifference as the reason why you don't get answers
- Complaining to people about the terrible care your mother receives
- Losing your temper

Resources Available

Entering into care can be a difficult transition. Even if you, or your family member's placement is temporary at Carewest, you may find life at a health care centre different from what you are used to – especially if it's your first time in a medical environment. Please keep in mind that there are many services and resources available to you, during this time in your life.

Social Workers: Carewest social workers are key in providing expertise in helping families and residents deal with the difficult issues of a chronic illness, dying and death as well as emotions such as guilt, anger, and fear. They support and develop some of our innovative programs and enhance care by providing family counseling, financial advice, engaging in resident advocacy, organizing family support groups, resident councils and coordinating other services.

Resident Councils and Family Support Groups/Forums:

Carewest resident councils give residents a chance to be involved, to contribute and to have a say in what goes on at their site. Also, each centre has opportunities for you and your family members to meet regularly to discuss issues and offer advice and suggestions about life at the centre. Family Support Groups give family members a chance to meet, share, discuss, learn and sometimes just have a good time.

Pain and Palliative Care Consulting Services: Carewest's Pain and Palliative Care Consulting Service team works with the care centres' interdisciplinary teams to provide pain and symptom management, grief and loss support, ongoing education about end-of-life concerns for families and staff, and volunteers who support residents, clients and families by sitting with loved ones at the end of their lives.

Please visit carewest.ca for more information about our services.

External Resources

Service Canada:
servicecanada.gc.ca

Veterans Affairs Canada:
veterans.gc.ca

Government of Assisted Living
and Social Services:
seniors.gov.ab.ca

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada:
mssociety.ca

Alzheimer Society of Alberta:
alzheimer.ab.ca

Easter Seals:
easterseals.ab.ca



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