

COMMUNICATION CONNECTION

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Kathryn Kilpatrick

All of us enjoy a good conversation with someone who is also a good listener. Sometimes communication problems make that more difficult and frequently using a few different approaches can help you to still share and connect and create some interesting exchanges!

Helpful communication suggestions to consider when speaking to someone with memory, concentration, or hearing difficulties

- Look at the person to whom you are speaking.
- Speak at a slower rate.
- Do not make your message or instructions complicated without periodically checking to see if they are following you.
- Encourage them to interrupt you if they are losing the content of what you are saying.
- If there is critical information being exchanged, verify that the message was understood.
- It can be helpful to write down some of the key points if they are having a problem understanding and remembering details.
- If a word is being repeated several times and is still not understood, spell it aloud or write it down.
- If there is a hearing problem, it is important not to try to speak to them in a setting that has a lot of background noise. Turn off the TV or radio. Try to sit nearby when you are talking to each other.
- If you are hard of hearing, do not try to fake it that you are understanding or following the conversation. Ask the person to repeat. What you have to say is important and if you may not realize the answer you are giving is not an answer to the question that was asked.
- Help others to know the best way for you to hear or understand what they are saying. Both of you will be less frustrated and be more likely to want to continue a conversation.
- If someone has word finding problems, do not test them for the recall of a word or name. Ask them yes/no questions or offer two word choices with one of the words being the correct option. (Example: Do you want to go to Kmart or Target?)

If you work together to help each other out when there are some limitations in communication, you will find the situation less frustrating and begin to look forward to sharing. Try some of these suggestions with your friends and family.

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VISUAL LIMITATIONS

Kathryn Kilpatrick

Many older adults experience limitations in their vision and these problems can vary from needing larger print to a marked decrease in their ability to read any written materials. This can be a very difficult adjustment especially if reading was a pastime they valued. If you have a friend or a loved one with these limitations, here are some suggestions that might help them continue to enjoy some of those simple pleasures with a little modification.

- There are many books and some magazines that are available in larger print
- Make out a master grocery list for them in large print so they can check off the items that they need instead of struggling with trying to read what they may have written in smaller print.
- A visually impaired person might appreciate having someone recopying his or her phone numbers, addresses or recipes in larger print for easier reference. If you come across an article they might enjoy and the print is too small, consider having it enlarged and bring it to them.
- Take advantage of the books on tapes that are available from the library or one of the mail order audio book clubs. In some cities there are audio rental stores being established. These make great gift suggestions and an excellent way to spend time with a loved one. Pick a special book and listen to it together when you are visiting.
- Many areas have a resource center for the visually impaired and programs include books on tape as well as options for a designated radio station that reads various local papers.
- Old radio show tapes are often a favorite of the older generation and bring back lots of memories. Try your local library and then consider them as gift options if this is something they enjoy.
- Listening to music can be very important for the visually impaired. Consider bringing them music that reminds them of their growing up years, favorite artists or perhaps other preferences such as religious music, or ethnic favorites. There are many sing-a-long tapes if they would like teaching their grandchildren the words to some of their favorite tunes.
- Consider getting a portable tape player with a headset so they can listen to the books on tape or music on their own.
- If you wanted to make a recording, you could tape readings from their hometown newspaper, other special articles of interest or perhaps some inspirational stories, bible passages or poetry.
- If they unable to attend a group gathering, you might want to record the meeting or messages from the members.
- If they have a recorder and can operate it easily, they could send taped messages back and forth to loved ones instead of letters.
- Try to obtain recordings of concerts or church services they are unable to attend and add those to their library.

It may be helpful to pay attention to all the little things you take for granted each day where you rely on your vision. See if there are some ways that you can help a friend or family member by simplifying some of those tasks for them. It may mean adapting it so there is a way they can still participate even if it is done with some assistance.

“It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself. RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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MAXIMIZING YOUR MEMORY

Kathryn Kilpatrick

Memory loss is not an inevitable part of getting older. We all have moments of forgetfulness such as wondering where did I put the keys or what am I looking for in the refrigerator? Our lives are often hectic and then there are all the extra things we need to recall such as changing area codes, 10 digit phone numbers, zip codes, ATM and computer passwords. It is no surprise that sometimes we just draw a blank when trying to recall some vital information.

Here are a few helpful hints:

- Pay attention and try to visualize what it is you want to remember.
- Try and place things in the same place, such as the car keys on the same hook or the scissors in a certain drawer.
- Use a calendar to keep track of appointments, birthdays or special events. Using one that shows the entire week on 2 pages allows you space to also write reminder notes of things to do that day. If possible keep the calendar size small enough so that you can easily carry it with you. Write things down as they come up rather than trying to recall it later.
- Write something you need to remember for a certain day on a piece of paper and tape it in the calendar or use a post-it note. Tape a note by the door as a reminder if you need to take something with you when you go out.
- Avoid using loose slips of paper that will easily get lost. Keep all your information in a small spiral bound notebook. That way the pages are attached, the information is in one place and you can easily refer back to it later.
- Now may be the time to take all those odd pieces of paper with phone numbers and addresses and record them in one place, whether it is in a new address book or on the computer.
- When you store less frequently used items away, keep a reference list as to where you put them so that you can find them more easily when you need them at a much later date.
- Use an accordion file to store important mail and papers. Label each section and when you sort the mail, put things in the proper pocket, such as bills to pay, receipts, insurance forms, invitations, meetings, etc. This way the papers you need are always in one place.
- If you are having trouble recalling telephone numbers, consider a phone with speed dialing features and larger buttons. Shop around and get one that is easy to program.
- If someone wants to leave a lengthy phone message, make sure you write it down. If you have an answering machine you may want to suggest that they call back and leave the message on the machine. Then you can have it to listen to several times if necessary.
- Write out the directions for things that involve too many steps like setting the microwave or using TV remote control. Do this for things you may do less frequently such as setting the VCR.
- You may experience more difficulty remembering when you are tired, on overload, not feeling well, or stressed. Sometimes doing things that require multiple steps such as balancing the checkbook will be easier to handle when you are more rested.
- Try eliminating some of the distractions such as the television, radio or background conversation when you are trying to concentrate. Giving a task your full attention can make a lot of difference.

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MEMORY ENHANCEMENT

Kathryn Kilpatrick

Winter starts off and a very busy time of year begins! Once the holidays are over, however, we can tend to spend a lot more of our time indoors as the temperatures drop and the snow starts to fly. It is important to not only keep physically active during those months but it is equally as important that you stay mentally fit as well. Keeping your brain stimulated means getting it out of cruise control and trying some new things especially during those months when we tend to be less active overall. Here are some thoughts of things you might do.

- When you hear a new word, look it up in the dictionary and then try to find a way to use it in a conversation several times in the next few days.
- Keep a map of the United States handy and when you hear about a location you are not familiar with, look it up. Or get an atlas of the world and look up the places in foreign countries that you hear about.
- On a cold winter day, bundle up and go to a museum with a friend and enjoy the exhibits. If something really appeals to you, look for a book on that topic so that you can learn more about the exhibit or something else in the museum.
- Go to the library and find some books on tape that appeal to you. Having these handy to listen to on a stormy day or when the television programs do not appeal to you is a great option.
- Volunteer for an organization. Take a friend with you and then stop for something to eat on your way home.
- If you are able to exercise but find yourself not doing as much of it as you would like in the colder weather, check with your local mall to see if there is an early morning walking group.
- Get a book on plants and consider purchasing one that will brighten your home during the winter months.
- Browse through the magazines at a local bookstore and buy one that appeals to you. Try a new magazine each month. Have several other friends do the same thing then exchange magazines once you have finished looking at it.
- Look through some favorite cookbooks and pick out a new recipe to try. Invite someone over to enjoy it with you.
- Take a class on a topic of interest or learn a new craft.
- Go into a store you have never been to before and take time to browse around.
- Take a day trip with a group to a place you have never visited. Capture some memories with pictures and then put them in an album along with a few little written stories about what you enjoyed.
- Spend some time with a person who is unable to get out of their home or who may be in a nursing home. Play a game with them, read something to them that they enjoy or bring along their favorite video and watch it together.
- Subscribe to a different newspaper on Sundays and enjoy a new perspective.
- Try and discover or learn one new thing each day!

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