



TELEPHONE REASSURANCE

**Tips for Effective Communication
with Older Adults**

MISSION OF TELEPHONE REASSURANCE

The purpose is to:

- Provide telephone calls to individuals for comfort and check on his or her “well-being and safety”.
- Reduce Isolation, victimization and health concerns
- Promote a sense of security for “at-risk” older adults



COMMUNICATION MISTAKES MADE WITH OLDER ADULTS – (THINGS TO AVOID)

When people get older, others can make mistakes in how they speak to an older person and make a bad first impression. Do not fall into these traps!

- **Speaking too slowly or too loudly** – do not assume the person is unintelligent or hard of hearing. If something you said is not understood, yelling or speaking very slow typically is no help
- Do not use “**baby-talk**” **with the person**, it is insulting and demeaning to the person you have on the phone.
- **Ask questions of the person you are calling.** Do not ask for someone else to speak for the individual useless to he or she asks you do so.



TIPS TO COMMUNICATE WITH OLDER ADULTS

There are some methods that are helpful to use when speaking with older individuals:

- Use Proper Form of Address (Mr., Mrs., Ms.) – Be Respectful and Nonjudgmental
- Be polite, kind, and speak in a clear voice
- Be courteous and do not rush the person
- Avoid sentences that go on too long
- Ask simple, direct (Yes or No) questions
- Be careful about language – Notice the tone and pace of your voice when speaking.



TIPS TO COMMUNICATE WITH OLDER ADULTS (CONTINUED)

- Reduce or limit background noise while talking on the telephone (no loud television, radio, eating, drinking)
- Be aware of Cultural and Generational Differences
- Do not rush the conversation - listen until the end. The person may have more to say.
- Always hang up only after the person called does. A slight delay supports your efforts for the call reinforcing the person is important.
- Ensure Understanding – Ask if they understand, if not, use different words to repeat the information



SENSORY IMPAIRMENTS WITH OLDER ADULTS

Hearing loss a common sensory condition that impacts older adults and results in communication issues. These tips can help reduce the problem:

- Be sure your initial greeting includes your name and the name of the service being provided
- Speak clearly and if needed a slightly slower but normal tone (pitch) of voice. A high pitch (tone) is more difficult to understand
- Pause briefly between sentences
- If the person has difficulty with letters and numbers, give a context for them. For instance, say “b” as in “blue” or ‘two’ as in “twins.” Older adults may hear vowels well, but not consonants.



Sensory Impairments with Older Adults

Cognitive Impairment can also affect communication with older adults. Tips to assisting such individuals include:

- If necessary, Helping orient the older person by explaining who you are and the reason you are calling
- Offer support and encouragement. If the person is searching for a word, provide gentle assistance, but do not rush him or her
- Using simple, direct wording. Ask questions or make statements one at a time
- If the person has difficulty understanding, rephrase what was said or use an example
- Older adults who have Cognitive Impairments may have problems answering open-ended questions. Use close-ended Yes/No instead



ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a way of listening that focuses the attention on the speaker and what is actually being said to improve mutual understanding. It is not being distracted and thinking about what you plan to do next.

*You have **two ears and one mouth** – you should **listen twice as much as you talk**.* Put your own thoughts on hold so that you can fully concentrate on what is being said to you. **Nothing is now more important than the person you are speaking to**

An active listener involves doing two things with the person you call:

1. You be responsible for understanding what the person is trying to communicate to you.
2. You show that you are sincerely interested in what is being communicated.

Telephone calls are communication without seeing the face, so a kind and polite voice creates a positive impression.



TALK WITH A SMILE IN YOUR VOICE!

- You can actually ‘hear’ a smile over the phone! When you smile, the muscles in your throat relax making the voice sound much warmer.
- Telecommunication is **55% voice tone, 38% words**, and 7% body language.
- Use a Personable Approach – keep conversation friendly, but respectful; and try to connect with them on a personal level, interested in what they have to say
- Keep it Easy and Uncomplicated – short simple sentences no jargon
- Use language similar to the client

Above All Remember:

Telephone Reassurance is support that offers reassurance (comfort) and gives the person confidence without making false promises.

(AIRS I&R Training Manual 2018 edition, Volume 1, section on serving older adults)

