



Tips for Communicating with Seniors

Seniors crave social connection as much as the rest of us. Unfortunately, sometimes they are less able to verbalize their feelings as well as they used to or are self-conscious about slower speech or reduced memory. Some extra effort may be needed to strike up a conversation with them.

It's important to try not to treat them differently. Realize that they have had rich experiences, which you can tap into and learn from during your time with them. Your honest and loving curiosity about their lives will both help to trigger memories for them as well as provide a natural path for conversation.

Planning for a Visit

If you know ahead of time that you'll be visiting a senior, consider bringing something to do or talk about that might help trigger memories for them. A few ideas include:

- A family photo album
- Music from when the person was young
- A simple craft project or puzzle
- A homemade goodie

If they have access to a kitchen and used to enjoy cooking, bring ingredients for a meal or snack you can enjoy making and eating together. This might spark conversations about favorite foods, cooking techniques, or recipes.



Avoid Talking Down

Do not use baby talk, a singsong voice, or inappropriately familiar terms of endearment. Talk to them as you would any other adult. Many seniors feel insulted when people talk to them as if they are children, even if those people don't mean any harm.

Questions to Spark a Conversation

If conversations don't seem to flow naturally, here are some questions that might help:

1. Who influenced your life the most?
2. What is the happiest moment of your life?
3. What is your proudest accomplishment?
4. What is your earliest memory? Note that many people's long-term memory stays intact much longer than their short-term memory.
5. Who were your friends when you were growing up?
6. Did you have a pet?
7. Did you travel when you were younger? Where was your favorite vacation?
8. What was your favorite hobby?
9. What was school like for you as a child? What were your favorite and least favorite subjects?
10. What do you wish you'd done that you didn't?



Source: [Aging Care](#)

Conversation Tips

It might be tempting to finish sentences, fill in blanks, or correct inconsistencies, but it is more respectful to give your full attention. Be patient if they aren't able to speak or think things through at their previous pace.

Try to stick to one topic at a time. Limit distractions to allow time to collect their thoughts. Turn off televisions or phones and move to a quiet corner, if possible.

This is a time of their lives that may be characterized by loss: loss of health, finances, friends, mobility, and control, to name just a few. If we let them talk about these losses, it often gives us opportunities to talk about alternatives that help them retain the control they have left.

When planning time together, rather than asking open-ended questions, give a couple of options. For instance, instead of "What would you like to eat?," try "Would you rather have tacos or spaghetti for dinner?"

Be aware of non-verbal communication. As people lose the ability to talk clearly, they may rely on other ways to communicate. Facial expressions may show sadness, anger, frustration, or other emotions. Allow them to express themselves verbally and non-verbally in every way they can.



The bottom line is that all humans crave connection. They want to feel valued, respected, and loved. The efforts you make to communicate with your loved ones and seniors that you spend time with may be valued far more than you even realize and maybe even far more than they can express to you.

Source: [MentalHelp.net](https://www.mentalhelp.net)