The Importance of Compassionate Communication with Older Adults

Submitted by: Lisa O’Neill, MPH, Director of Education, The University of Arizona Center on Aging

Walk a mile in my shoes... When communicating with older adults it can be very easy to forget about the challenges they may be facing, such as changes in hearing, vision, energy, voice, or cognition. It can be easy to lose your patience. Empathy is being aware and sensitive to someone’s emotions — to vicariously experience and understand those feelings. Enhancing your empathic skills can help you put yourself in their shoes and get past those moments of frustration. However, taking empathy a step further is compassion. Compassion is the desire to take action to alleviate another person’s discomfort or sadness. Compassion takes the focus off of ourselves, and what we think is “best,” and helps us consider ways to help someone feel better based upon what they desire, even when it differs from our own notions of what is most appropriate. Compassionate communication is about careful listening and conversing with someone to learn how to best provide for their needs.

Consciously practicing these 4 things can improve your compassionate communication skills:

1. **Remove distractions** — it’s hard to pay attention to someone else if we are multitasking.
2. **Be observant** — watch for facial and body clues that can give away how someone is feeling.
3. **Listen** — listen to the other person’s tone of voice; it can be very revealing.
4. **Be curious** — focus on being interested in what the other person is saying.

Remember that many older adults have health conditions that can interfere with communication. If possible, try to reduce any background noise and look directly at them while talking. Keep your sentences short and only talk about one topic at a time. You might find it helpful to stick to familiar subjects. We all love to share stories and reminisce, so don’t rush your conversations. Learn to become comfortable with long pauses and silence. Give them time to connect with you. Compassionate communication ensures that the older adult is allowed to freely express their thoughts and feelings to better meet their needs. Fortunately for us, compassion is a two-way street and even the smallest act of caring for someone else can allow us to feel greater personal satisfaction and happiness. The Dalai Lama once said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

Compassionate communication takes time and practice, but it is well worth the effort!

Lisa M. O’Neill, MPH, is the Director of Education at The University of Arizona Center on Aging, aging.arizona.edu. Her email is loneill@aging.arizona.edu. To learn more about related elder care and caregiving resources from UA Life & Work Connections, email Caryn Jung, MS at jungc@email.arizona.edu or visit lifework.arizona.edu/ec.
NEW! Optimum You! Foundations 6-Class Workshop
START HERE. START NOW! START WHERE YOU ARE!

UA Life & Work Connections is excited to present a new workshop designed to help you get back to basics and work toward your best self! As UA employees, we will work together to set and achieve goals, and overcome barriers. Series will take place at the Student Union (Room TBA), on the following dates: Feb. 16 and 23, and March 1, 15, and 22 from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Presenters include Susan Pickering, MEd, LPC; Jodi Charvoz, MEd, RDN, ACE Personal Trainer; and Christy Wilson, RDN.

Please email Susan Pickering to RSVP at pickerings@email.arizona.edu. Class size is limited.

NEW! Metabolic Syndrome Screening
Registration required. Please register online at lifework.arizona.edu/wws/metabolic_screenings_worksite_wellness.

Life & Work Connections Employee Wellness is offering a new screening free for UA employees eligible for full benefits. The screening includes tests for the five factors evaluated for metabolic syndrome: blood pressure, waist circumference, fasting blood glucose, fasting triglycerides, and high-density lipoprotein (good cholesterol). These screening tests also fulfill requirements for the Health Impact Program. Consult the LWC website for more information.

Individual Employee Health Screenings
Registration required. Please register online at lifework.arizona.edu/wws/health_screenings_worksite_wellness.

This program is for employees eligible for full benefits. The screening includes blood pressure; total cholesterol and HDL; body composition; cardiac endurance step test; nutrition, fitness, and resilience consultation. If you are concerned about your risk for diabetes, you may also have the A1c diabetes screening for a $10 charge. This screening measures your long-term glucose levels (A1c). Neither blood test requires that you fast.

Department Screenings
We will come to your department for groups of 12 or more, assess blood pressure, total cholesterol/HDL, and % body fat at your location. Please call 626-4760 to schedule a department screening or for more information.

Maricopa County Employee Wellness Life & Work Connections offers work/life and employee wellness programming every month at the Phoenix Biomedical Campus. Check lifework.arizona.edu/wws/phoenixcampus for the schedule. Contact Jodi Charvoz, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and ACE Personal Trainer, to schedule a nutrition or fitness consultation at jcharvoz@email.arizona.edu.

Walk Across Arizona
Gather your coworkers, form a team, and get moving! Virtually walk across our great state of Arizona by participating in this year’s 6-week statewide walking program. Sponsored by UA Cooperative Extension and UA Life & Work Connections, the vision of the Walk Across Arizona campaign is to encourage individuals and families to increase their participation in activities that promote a healthy lifestyle. Check our website for more information. lifework.arizona.edu/wws/walkacrossarizona

Walks with Campus Leaders
Take 20 minutes for fresh air, a lively walk, and good company! Join campus leaders and Life & Work Connections for fun noon time walks around campus. Please visit lifework.arizona.edu/wws/walks_with_campus_leaders for locations, dates, and honored leaders.

Resistance Bands for Strength Classes
Wednesdays: Student Union, Presidio Room (4th floor), noon to 12:40 p.m.
Wednesdays: University Services Building (USB 216), 12:30 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.
lifework.arizona.edu/wws/strength_training

Weight Check Dates
Want to keep yourself accountable by a weight check, a quick chat with a registered dietitian nutritionist, and a helpful handout? Stop by the Student Union, Copper Room (4th floor) from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., or the UA Life & Work Connections office from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Visit lifework.arizona.edu/wws/available_classes/weightchallenges for updates, times, and room location.

Tai Chi for Health
Tai Chi is a mind/body activity known for its health benefits, including stress reduction, balance, and joint pain improvement. UA Life & Work Connections offers free Tai Chi for Health and Tai Chi for Energy classes. Registration is required. Check lifework.arizona.edu/wws/classes/taichi for the current class schedule.

Guided Potlucks
Here’s a new way to liven up your departmental meetings! For details, please check LWC’s website or email Christy at cwilson4@email.arizona.edu.

Consultations and Support
Free, voluntary, and confidential consultations, informal assessment, referral, or brief problem-solving support. Employees can be seen for any reason, including alcohol, substance abuse, stress management, parenting, relationship, depression, anxiety, and more. Call 621-2493 to schedule with Susan Pickering, MEd, LPC, or Dave Swihart, MC, LPC.

Supervisor Consultation
Regarding individual and work group issues. Call for an appointment. 621-2493

Child Care and Family Resources
For information on the Child Care Voucher and Sick Child and Emergency/Back-Up Care Programs, please call Kim Peters at 621-4365. Visit lifework.arizona.edu for forms, guidelines, and detailed information.

For a personalized phone or in-person consultation on lactation, changing table, infant/toddler, preschool, or school-age care resources, please call Caryn Jung, MS, at 621-9870.

Elder Care and Life Cycle Resources
Call Caryn Jung, MS, at 621-9870 to request a personalized phone or in-person consultation to discuss area and national elder care and family caregiving referrals.

Nutrition/Fitness Coaching
Call Jodi Charvoz, MEd, RDN, ACE, at 626-4760 for more information or to schedule an appointment.

Work/Life Integration
Learn about the University’s guide on flexible work arrangements, related workplace and workforce issues, and strategies for coordinating work/life matters, by calling Caryn Jung, MS, at 621-9870.
Our bodies have evolved to move, yet we now use the energy in oil instead of muscles to do our work.
— David Suzuki

Track your ticker to make sure it stays on target during exercise

Knowing what your target heart rate should be and paying attention to whether you’re in the right range while working out can help you to get the most from your physical activity without overdoing it. Your target heart-rate range (about 50% to 85% of your maximum heart rate) is based on your age. This range is where your heart gets the most benefit from exercise. To learn more about target heart rates, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/heartrate.

See page 8 —

Stock Your Toolbox:
See how you can link to Cool Tools & Resources to learn more about the topics in this issue!

Guilt may not motivate kids to move more

Students who feel they aren’t in control of their exercise choices or who feel that adults are pressuring them to be more active typically aren’t, according to a study in the journal, Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise. To help kids find activities that fit their personalities, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/fitkids.

Get Moving:
Walk like a pro, even if you’re just getting started

Walking is a great way for most anyone to be active.

Do it without much worry about how you look or how fast you go. With that said, though, if you want to improve your walking workout, concentrate on form.

• **Keep your arms relaxed** and bend your elbows at 90-degree angles. Let your arms swing into a natural stride with your legs.

• **Press your shoulders down** and stand straight.

• **Keep your head neutral** and your gaze straight ahead.

• **Pull in your abdominal muscles** as you walk. Use them to hold your spine straight and in place.

• **Land on your heels**, roll forward to the balls of your feet, and then push off with your big toes.

• **As you quicken your pace**, take more steps per minute instead of lengthening your strides, which can strain muscles.

For a cold-weather fitness guide, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/coldweather.

Source: American Heart Association

Take 30 minutes for your heart

Did you realize that following the long-standing recommendation to get 30 minutes of daily activity could reduce your risks of cardiovascular issues (*heart attack, stroke, etc.*) by as much as 30% to 40%?

In addition to keeping your heart healthy, you’ll likely burn between 600 and 1,200 calories over the course of a week.

Need some ideas for what to do? Think anything that would be comparable to walking briskly at about 3 to 4 miles per hour. This might include yard work, household tasks, cycling, or swimming.

Source: Circulation. 2003; 107: e2-e5

At the Heart of the Matter

Learn more about Get Moving: at Feb.HopeHealth.com and start walking!
Man has made many machines, complex and cunning, but which of them indeed rivals the workings of his heart?
— Pablo Casals

One more reason to get a good night’s sleep
Missing or skipping a single night of sleep may cause you to take in more fat the next day, according to one study. Researchers concluded that people who experience stretches of forced wakefulness may make unhealthful food choices because of a shift in brain activity. For more on sleep and eating, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/sleep.
Source: Healthfinder.gov

‘On the go’ lunches may not be the way to go for weight control
Although a convenient way to fit lunch into a hectic schedule, eating “on the go” may lead to weight gain and obesity in people who diet, suggested research in the Journal of Health Psychology.

Observed dieters who ate a cereal bar while walking around went on to eat more snacks later.

The right rest may be best for your heart
You eat smart and exercise often, so no need to worry about your heart, right? Maybe not, if you’re not getting the right amount of sleep and quality rest.

A recent study of more than 47,000 young and middle-aged adults suggests that otherwise healthy people with poor sleep habits may be more likely to suffer from stiffened arteries and calcium deposit on the walls of major arteries – both early signs of heart disease. These symptoms appeared in individuals who got too much or too little sleep, as well as those who didn’t get quality rest.

The sweet spot for sleep was right about seven hours.

Note: The study uncovered a link between poor sleep and possible heart issues, but did not prove a cause-and-effect connection.

The Whole You: Water may wash away risk for kidney stones
Drinking plenty of water is a good thing for your health. Add one more plus to the water-benefits list. Staying well hydrated may lower your risk of kidney stones.

According to an analysis of nine studies, drinking enough water each day may cut your risk for developing kidney stones in half.

The review found that people who produced 2 to 2.5 liters of urine daily (about ½ gallon) were 50% less likely to form kidney stones than those who produced less urine. That amount is associated with drinking about eight to 10 8-ounce glasses of water daily.

The researchers explained that frequent urination means stone-causing minerals have less opportunity to settle and bond in the kidneys and urinary tract.

For more on kidney stones, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/kidneystones.
Source: National Kidney Foundation

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Learn more about The Whole You: at Feb.HopeHealth.com and stay healthy.
Can’t carry a tune? Sing more often.

Many people want to sing better, but believe it’s a lost cause. That may not be the case. One study found that singing on key is a learned skill that can decline over time if not used and that singing requires the same type of practice as learning an instrument. For information on how music can help your health, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/music.

Source: Northwestern University news release, Feb. 9, 2015

Don’t let worry have its way with you

Occasional anxiety is normal. You may feel anxious about an issue at work or making an important personal decision. But, if you worry too much for too long, and it takes physical and mental tolls on you, then you may have a problem. To take an assessment about anxiety in your own life, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/anxiety.

Having purpose may help to keep your ticker in tip-top shape

Purpose in life may boost your feeling that life is worth living, one researcher explained.

Compared to people with a low sense of purpose, those possessing a strong sense of purpose in the studies had:
- A 23% reduced risk of death from any cause.
- A 19% reduced risk for cardiovascular issues, such as heart attack, stroke, or a need for a coronary artery stent placement or bypass surgery.

Take time for self-reflection and define personal goals that may give you a sense of satisfaction and energy.

Source: HealthFinder.gov

Put your heart, mind, and soul into even your smallest acts. This is the secret of success.

— Swami Sivananda
Fiscal Fitness:
Know what you owe in taxes to avoid giving Uncle Sam an interest-free loan

Tax season is here. For many people, that means a refund from the federal government, state government, and/or local government will soon be on its way.

Many taxpayers appreciate the “extra” money they receive once a year. But, if you look at it another way, the money was yours all along, and you’ve simply loaned that money to the government. The refund is just the government paying back that money… without interest. If you’d rather just be at or around even when settling up your tax obligation with the government at tax time (you neither get a refund nor have to pay in to the government to make up taxes you owe), try using a tax calculator and adjust your withholdings accordingly. To access an online tax calculator, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/taxes.

Source: National Endowment for Financial Education (SmartAboutMoney.org)

Your heart likely doesn’t like financial stress

Need another reason to be as fiscally fit as possible?

Keeping your money matters in line may help to keep your heart healthy. In one study of middle-aged and older women, researchers found that a history of financial struggle was associated with a two-fold higher risk for a heart attack compared to those without money issues.

For a guide to help understand finances and address financial goal setting, getting out of debt, using a checking account and credit cards, monitoring and controlling spending, and boosting savings and investments, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/finances.

Sources: American Heart Association; American Stroke Association; National Endowment for Financial Education

Learn how much you’re worth… from a financial perspective

Your net worth is the value of everything you own (assets) minus what you owe (liabilities). If you own more than you owe, you have a positive net worth. If you owe more than you own, you have a negative net worth. To figure out your net worth and how it can grow in the next 10 years, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/networth.

Should you change your payroll deductions?

If you’ve had a major life change or anticipate one, you may want to check into changing your withholdings, filing status, or retirement savings with your employer’s payroll department. Go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/paycheck to access a payroll deduction calculator to see how your check could change with adjustments. Before you make any changes, though, you may want to consult with a trusted financial advisor to be sure the changes are in your short- and long-term best interests.

A wise man should have money in his head, but not in his heart.

— Jonathan Swift

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Nosebleeds got you nervous? Usually no need to worry.

An occasional nosebleed is quite common during the dry, winter months. If you get a nosebleed, don’t panic. Apply firm pressure to the nostrils for five to 10 minutes. Lean forward to avoid swallowing the blood and breathe through your mouth. For more on nosebleeds, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/nose.

What’s Trending Now:

Feed kids’ emotions with healthful parenting to help avoid eating issues

You can help your youngsters to grow up with a healthy attitude toward themselves and food with healthful parenting.

Source: “How To Nurture Healthy Eating Habits In Your Children,” by Gregory L. Jantz, PhD (EatingDisorderHope.com)

• Keep your promises so your children aren’t dealing with unnecessary disappointments.
• Be affectionate. Give hugs, tell kids that you love them, and pay attention to them. Children want to feel that they matter. If they don’t, they may turn to food.
• Be safe. Protect your kids from physical and emotional harm, and help them to protect themselves as they grow. Really know the people in your children’s lives so you can make sure these individuals are safe.
• Set boundaries. Let your children know how important boundaries are. Draw lines in relationships with everything and stick to them.
• Have structure. Children need structure and appropriate traditions, a certain sense of sameness day after day.

Kitchen germs may lurk on cloth towels

Many people touch hand towels before washing their hands or use the towels after not washing their hands enough, which could lead to foodborne illness, according to one study.

• More than 90% of the fruit salads that the participants prepared were contaminated with the study’s tracer bacteria. If the tracer had been a harmful germ such as salmonella, there would have been a high risk of foodborne illness.
• Four out of five subjects also left raw meat contamination on the sink faucet, refrigerator, oven, and trash container.

The researchers recommend washing cloth towels after using them while preparing a meal, or using paper towels and throwing them away after each use.

For more on food safety, go to Feb.HopeHealth.com/foodsafety.

Source: Kansas State University, news release, March 23, 2015

See even more of What’s Trending Now at Feb.HopeHealth.com.
Valentine’s Day is just one day.

Instead of packing all of your expressions of love into 24 hours (or less), use the entire month of February to show your love to those you love. Use different ways to express your affections each week.

Feb 1 – 7: Spend time together. You don’t have to do something grand, just together. Maybe it’s grabbing a cup of coffee.

Feb 8 – 14: Give a gift. It’s the thought that counts, so consider sentimental over sensational. Perhaps you put together a playlist of your loved one’s favorite songs.

Feb 15 – 21: Express yourself — either vocally or in writing. Include “I love you,” but go beyond that. Let the person know what you love about him or her.

Feb 22 – 29: Pitch in. Do something nice for your loved one. Take a to-do off his or her list. Or, get around to that honey-do task.

StockYourToolBox:
Your Source for Cool Tools & Resources

Check out Feb.HopeHealth.com for a ton of useful wellbeing information. In addition to the links included throughout the newsletter, here’s what else you can find online:

A downloadable tip sheet on “The inside scoop on making the perfect SNOWMAN” — from how to form the first, base snowball to how to put on the finishing touches.

A one-minute video on how to get the best sleep possible. Set yourself up for slumber success with a healthful pre-bed plan.

A one-minute video showing three toning moves you can do anywhere without any special equipment.

A one-minute video on understanding your credit score and what goes into it so you can make sure your number is the highest it can be.

A crossword puzzle to find out how well you know the topics covered in this issue of the newsletter.

H OPE Health Info:
Until next issue

When most people think of February, the first thing that comes to their minds is the heart — maybe not their physical hearts, but a heart nonetheless.

With friendly heart-shaped reminders pretty much everywhere this month, take this time to focus on your own heart health. So much of what you do, think, and feel can affect your heart and cardiovascular system, which in turn affects your overall health. If you use February to develop new, healthful habits and/or get rid of some not-so-good-for-you behaviors, you may set yourself up for better cardiovascular health and a better life.

Until next issue, give yourself a special Valentine by focusing more on your own heart health.