

SECTION II

Communication Tips



II. COMMUNICATION TIPS

Awareness of the following will help you to have successful interviews with clients.

A. General Interviewing Tips

INTERVIEWING TIPS

The interviewee may be intimidated by caretakers or others in the surrounding area. Always try to conduct at least part of the interview in a private setting.

Before starting a formal interview, assess vision, hearing and speaking problems.

Does your client have hearing aids, glasses or dentures? If so, are they wearing them?

Some clients (e.g., people with aphasia, a partial or total loss of verbal communication) may do better with pen and paper as their mode of communication.

Be polite and respectful: address client as “Mr.” “Mrs.” or “Ms.” unless invited to use their first name. Or, ask the person how they would prefer to be addressed.

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Try to conduct the interview in a quiet area. Before you begin your conversation, reduce distracting background noises (turn off television, close the door or move to a quieter place). Be aware of baby monitors that can be used to listen in on the interview. Ask the client if he or she is comfortable with the lighting.

Many older adults have trouble with glare. Try to sit where you are not backlit by a window or other light source. Avoid sitting in front of windows or bright lights which may cause glare. This may distort vision, especially for those with cataracts.

When the client is signing a release form, can he or she find the signature line without help? Can he or she read what is being signed?

Comfort

Assure that the client is “just right”: not too hot, not too cold, not too tired, not too distracted, not in pain...

Positioning

The person being interviewed should be comfortable, physically and emotionally. The interviewer should face the interviewee at eye level, noting facial expressions and willingness to answer questions.

Best time of day

Prior to an interview, try to find out if the person has a “best time of day” and conduct your interview at that time. For example some elders (especially those with dementia) experience a phenomenon known as “sundowning,” meaning that they become more confused in the latter part of the day.

Medication effects

Note if any medicines have been taken in the hours prior to the interview. Be specific about name, dose, and time taken. Ask if any meds cause sedation or fatigue.

Recording medicine information is often overlooked, but very important to do! Refer to Section V, Medications and Prescriptions, page 81, for more information. You will want to note name of medicine, dosage, instructions for how often to take and prescribing physician’s name.

Avoid leading questions

Avoid leading questions if you are evaluating for abuse. Ask open-ended questions that allow the person to tell their story in their own words. Use direct quotes when appropriate (e.g. “My daughter hit me with the telephone.” instead of: client states her daughter hit her) in your documentation.

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