

Getting Along: Ten Tips for Working with Professional Caregivers*

by Fiona Middleton, MSM

Change is always difficult. When the change involves inviting a stranger into one's home, or the home of a family member, for a few hours daily, or on a live-in basis, the adjustments can be tough for everyone. Good relationships are based on expectations. Family members, the person receiving care, and the caregiver should each identify expectations early in the process. The client will have certain expectations about the way care should be provided. For example, clients and family members should expect the caregiver to fit into existing routines, rather than the other way around. The care recipient will also have an expectation that the caregiver will show up for work on time, and maintain a professional demeanor.

The professional caregiver will also have some expectations. Taking a few moments during his or her first visit to find out what each person expects of the other will reduce stress and lead to a better relationship. Below are some suggestions that will help the adaptation process for both families and their caregivers.

1. Keep an open line of communication. Offer feedback to the caregiver so she knows when she is on track.
2. Talk about telephone usage, TV watching, food, noise, and other issues that someone might discuss with a new housemate.
3. Let the caregiver know how she can help. Be clear and specific with instructions.
4. Write down appointments and keep a checklist of items that can be completed if the caregiver has extra time.
5. Post a list of emergency telephone numbers in a prominent location (e.g., on the refrigerator). Make advance directives or living wills available in case of an emergency.
6. Let the caregiver know when she does something well or exceeds expectations.
7. If the caregiver's performance could improve through a change in her behavior, be as specific as possible. Address the behavior that should be changed, but try not to criticize the caregiver on a personal level.
8. Whenever possible, give the caregiver advance notice of his or her schedule. If the schedule changes, let your caregiver know well ahead of time so she can make alternate arrangements.
9. Remember that the caregiver is only human, not a machine. She will need occasional breaks to eat, relax, or enjoy a change of scene.
10. Be generous with your praise. The caregiver probably began her profession because she has a desire to help people. Hearing about how good she is making someone feel will probably make her day!

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