

Cognitive Impairment Intervention Protocol (CIIP) for Caregiver Interactions with a Person with Cognitive Impairment:

II. EXPLANATION AND REASSURANCE

Look for ways to:

- Show reassurance to this person
- Clearly explain events, requests, and the environment to this person

A. Do I give verbal
reassurance as often
as necessary?

NO

YES

1. Listen to what you say.
2. Use words as often as this person needs them, even if it means repeating yourself.
3. Use words and phrases like "It's OK." or "We'll do it together." or "That's good." or "You're doing that very well." or "She/he knows you're here."

B. Do I give
nonverbal reassurance
as often as
necessary?

NO

YES

1. Monitor your body movements and position.
2. Listen to how you sound (whether you are saying words or simply making sounds).
3. Remind yourself that this person may respond more to how you appear than to how you sound, and more to how you sound than to the words you say.
4. Use your face, gestures and body stance to communicate reassurance and calm.
5. Let your body say that everything is okay or that you will take care of a problem, whether or not this person can understand words.
6. Speak slowly and lower the pitch of your voice to keep the sound of your voice calm and reassuring.
7. Use touch and stroking to reassure.
8. Before touching, remind yourself that this person may be particularly sensitive to touch. Your touch might send sensations such as "pins and needles", "bugs crawling", or "tickling" up and down her/his skin, or be extraordinarily painful or uncomfortable. A soft touch might feel like a hit, or like intense heat or cold. Watch constantly this person's face and body and listen to what she/he says to recognize evidence of her/his level of sensitivity or discomfort with touch at this time.
9. When touching, minimize the number of times your hand leaves and returns to her/his body, since her/his body may have difficulty adjusting to the initiation of touch.
10. Use the palm of your hand rather than individual fingers when touching to minimize the number of contact points between your hand and her/his body.
11. Use a gentle but firm pressure when touching, when light touch seems to be particularly uncomfortable. Avoid applying so much pressure that your touch hurts this person.

C. Do I avoid giving this person information that would be distressing or embarrassing?

NO

YES

1. Remind yourself that your goal at all times is to help this person feel good.
2. Avoid situations or comments that might embarrass or distress her/him. For example, avoid discussing this person's incontinence when other people are nearby.
3. When this person must be told upsetting news, tell her/him only as much information as she/he needs.
4. Deliver any upsetting information compassionately, beginning with positive statements and reassurance of your love and support.
5. Avoid pointing out this person's mistakes. Instead, discreetly adjust a situation to "fix" the mistake without her/him knowing the mistake was made.
6. Avoid shaming this person into proper behavior (e.g., avoid saying "What would your mother say if she heard you talk that way?").
7. Focus on this person's feelings rather than her/his behavior. Avoid bringing the behavior to this person's attention. Reassure her/him with "It's OK." rather than "Stop doing that."
8. Give this person only truthful information.
9. Give her/him only as much information as she/he needs to feel comfortable and satisfied. Often with cognitive impairment, excess information is confusing and distressing.
10. Adapt the amount and nature of information you give to this person's needs and desires, level of functioning, and the circumstances. (For example, when she/he asks, "Where is my husband?" avoid saying her deceased husband is dead unless you are sure she won't be surprised and grieve. You might say "He knows you are here." or "He's not here right now.")

D. Do I give information or make a request only when this person is emotionally calm and ready to hear me, so she/he does not need to feel emotion and think about my words at the same time?

NO

YES

1. Wait until this person is calm and focused on you and your words, before giving her/him information or asking her/him to say or do something.
2. Avoid requiring this person to think about your words at the same time she/he is feeling emotion.
3. Before you speak, watch this person's eyes to know she/he sees and recognizes you and is paying attention to you.
4. Use calming, reassuring words rather than a request to stop, even when this person is doing something that needs to be stopped immediately.

E. Do I give as much explanation as this person needs?

NO

YES

1. Give as much explanation as is necessary for this person to feel comfortable.
2. Clarify frequently to avoid confusion.
3. Explain to this person what is happening in the surrounding environment, in your interactions with her/him, and during the task she/he is performing.
4. Remind yourself that her/his ability to figure out why something is happening, why someone is saying something, or what she/he needs to do next may be impaired.

F. Do I repeat requests or explanations as often as necessary?

NO

YES

1. Repeat requests or explanations as often as necessary, since this person may easily and frequently forget what you say.
2. If this person understood you the first time but forgot what you said, then repeat the request or explanation in exactly the same words used the first time, since changing them might be confusing or tiring.
3. Watch and listen carefully to this person to see if another repetition would be helpful.
4. If this person doesn't understand you the first time, then give the same request or explanation using different words that may be more meaningful to her/him, or by speaking more slowly and clearly.
5. Watch and listen carefully to this person to see if she/he understood what you said.
6. Watch and listen carefully to this person to see if she/he realizes your comments apply to her/him.

G. Are explanations short, simple and clear?

NO

YES

1. Use short and simple sentences (e.g., "It's ok. They are testing the alarms.") Avoid elaborate, multi-phrase explanations.
2. Watch this person to see if your explanation is clear and satisfying. If the person is relaxed and not distressed, then slowly give more explanation until she/he has heard enough.

H. Do I use few words and short phrases and words?

NO

YES

1. Use as few words as possible to get the point across. Try to talk less and smile more.
2. Watch this person to see if it would help to use more or fewer words.
3. Listen to your own words.
4. Choose your words carefully.
5. Use only adult words.

I. Do I use concrete and familiar words?

NO

YES

1. Use words that are meaningful to this person.
2. Use words that this person uses now or used in the past (e.g., "couch" versus "sofa"; "urinate" versus "pee").
3. Use words that are not too abstract (e.g., "the red dress" rather than "the fancy dress" or "go to the toilet" rather than "use the restroom").

J. Do I wait to talk until there is no other noise?

NO

YES

1. Wait to speak until the background noises or voices are gone. Background noises make hearing more difficult with normal age-related hearing changes and attention more difficult with cognitive impairment.
2. Preserve this person's energy, even when she/he can hear and attend, by reducing the background or competing noise.
3. Turn off fans, TVs, etc.
4. Close the door.
5. Move to a quiet place for conversations.
6. Have only one conversation occur at a time.

K. Do I speak clearly and in a low pitch?

NO

YES

1. Enunciate clearly but normally (i.e., with a normal rhythm, pitch, and emphasis on syllables) to accommodate hearing loss and cognitive impairment.
2. Lower the pitch of your voice, since normal age related hearing changes make it more difficult to hear high pitched sounds (including consonants such as "f" and "s" and words such as "food" and "bath"). A low pitched voice may be more effective than talking louder, and may also sound calmer and more reassuring.
3. Listen to yourself talk, and watch this person to see if you are being heard and understood.

L. Do I talk slowly when necessary and use pauses, to allow time for processing?

NO

YES

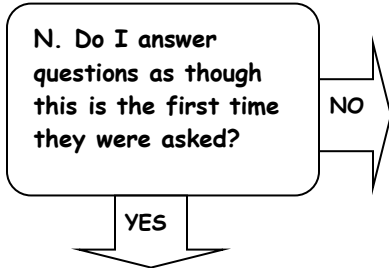
1. Preserve this person's energy by making it easy for her/him to understand you.
2. Slow the pace of your sentences to allow her/him time to understand what you are saying.
3. Pause between sentences or phrases to allow her/him time to process what you are saying.
4. Give this person any additional time she/he needs to produce speech.
5. Continue to sound natural and normal while talking more slowly. Avoid changing the normal rhythm and pitch of the sounds and words you use.
6. Watch this person to help you know how slowly to talk. She/he should not have to work hard to follow your words. Watch to see if the slow pace of your words feels calm and reassuring to her/him, particularly if she/he is anxious, confused, or uncertain.

M. Do I give clear and honest answers to each question this person asks?

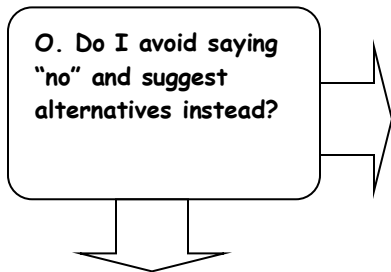
NO

YES

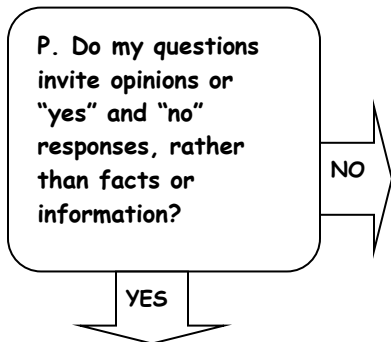
1. When this person asks a question or seems to want to know something, give an honest answer as clearly and as compassionately as possible.
2. Give only the information that was requested. Giving too much information can create anxiety and confusion.
3. Adapt the amount and nature of information you give to this person's needs and desires, level of functioning, and the circumstances. (For example, when she asks, "Where is my husband?" avoid saying her deceased husband is dead unless you are sure she won't be surprised and grieve. You might say, "He knows you are here," or "He's not here right now.")
4. Respond to each question as it is asked, rather than avoiding it or changing the subject. After a brief response, you can redirect her/his attention to something appealing, such as food or a favorite activity.
5. When a question reflects a feeling, responding to the feeling may be more important than answering the question with facts only. (For example, if she/he asks "Will you take me home?" when she/he feels confused or lonely, avoid saying "This is your home now." You might hug her/him and say "I can see why you'd want to go home. Let's have some ice cream now, and we'll talk more about that later.")
6. Avoid saying "no" as much as possible. Respond positively and with alternative suggestions. (For example, if she/he asks "When is the bus coming?" you might say "Let's look up that information in a little bit; right now I need your advice about supper.")



1. When repeated questioning is due to memory loss, use the same response (words, facial expressions, and gestures) every time she/he asks the same question, if the first response seemed to satisfy or comfort her/him. Do this even if the question is repeated frequently over a very short period of time, since a repeated successful response will likely continue to be successful.
2. A question may be repeated because this person thinks more time has passed, since the last time she/he asked the question, than has actually passed. In this case, change your response to the repeated question.
3. Avoid embarrassing or confusing this person by reminding her/him that she/he has already asked that question or that you're tired of answering it. Calmly reassure her/him.



1. Avoid saying "no" when this person makes a request verbally or nonverbally, since she/he may have difficulty processing both a "no" response and her/his own emotional reactions to the response at the same time. It may also be hard for her/him to consider how to act in response to the "no".
2. Suggest another time or an alternative action. For example, instead of saying "No, it's too cold to go outside", try saying "Maybe we can later. Right now, could you please help me with supper?"



1. Avoid asking this person directly for information. She/he may not be able to answer and might get nervous, embarrassed or flustered. She/he may have the information, but may have difficulty accessing it or telling it to you. Frequently, a "memory problem" is actually an access or communication problem.
2. Ask questions that only require a "yes" or "no" response (e.g., "Would you like eggs for breakfast?" rather than "What would you like for breakfast?")
3. Ask for opinions. Sometimes the information might be included in the response. For example, ask "They say parents should never give candy to a child now. What do you think about that?" rather than "How many children do you have?" This person might respond with "Honey, I gave my children candy after supper every day, and they are just fine now." She might continue to name all of her children, their professions, and their current cities of residence to demonstrate how successful they are!

Q. Do I let this person know how much time has passed and what time of day it is, whenever necessary?

NO

YES

1. Tell this person how much time has passed when she/he seems to need to know, since she/he may have difficulty accurately recognizing time and its passing. For example, when this person is sitting at the table eating a meal, she/he may not know whether she/he has been sitting there for 2 minutes or 2 hours. If she/he isn't feeling hungry, or if her/his attention has shifted from the food, she/he may leave the table after only a few minutes of eating. In this situation, you might casually say "These beans are delicious. Since we only just began eating them, they are still warm. I'll cool them a little."
2. Tell this person what time of day it is. For example, say that it is morning when you wake her/him up.
3. Keep daily activities, events, and task steps of daily routines in a consistent order, so this person begins to know what comes next. This provides a basic structure to time, even when she/he doesn't know what time it is or how much time has passed.

R. Do I tell this person when a task is done?

NO

YES

1. Gently tell this person when a task is done, since this person may be unable to stop doing the task, or to recognize when the task is completed. For example, she/he may wash the same placemat over and over. If it is time to stop, say "Oh, what a nice job you've done." as you gently remove the placemat from her/his hand.

S. Do I prepare this person before touching any part of her/his body, for example by asking permission or by informing her/him verbally?

NO

YES

1. Alert this person that you are going to touch her/him before doing so, since she/he may be particularly sensitive to touch. Your touch might send sensations such as "pins and needles", "bugs crawling", or "tickling" up and down her/his skin, or be extraordinarily painful or uncomfortable. A soft touch might feel like a hit, or like intense heat or cold. Anticipation can help her/him prepare emotionally and help her/his body to reduce the undesired sensation.
2. Ask permission to touch. Acknowledge this person's autonomy and right to choose or say "no".
3. Watch this person carefully and constantly for evidence of resistance to or discomfort with touch.

T. Do I prepare this person before she/he moves, nonverbally by touching and stroking a body part before moving it and verbally by asking her/him to move it?

NO

YES

1. Prepare this person both physically and emotionally, since moving a body part can be difficult, painful or uncomfortable due to age, brain impairment, weakness, or rigidity (particularly in the joints).
2. Remind yourself that discomfort with touch and movement may be unpredictable. Each part of this person's body may have a different level of sensitivity and discomfort. The presence and degree of sensitivity or discomfort may also change from one moment to the next, or may fluctuate rapidly (for example she/he may feel the water temperature is too cold then too warm then too cold again within just a few minutes).
3. Watch this person's face and body constantly and listen to what she/he says to recognize evidence of the level of sensitivity or discomfort with touch and movement at this time.
4. Go slowly enough to allow this person time to prepare for your touch, to move, and to respond to your questions and comments.
5. Encourage this person to move the body part her/himself, rather than your moving it for her/him. This will likely be less uncomfortable.
6. Ask this person verbally to move the body part (e.g., "Please lift your arm.") before touching her/him.
7. Ask this person verbally for permission to move the body part (e.g., "May I lift your arm?" or "May I help you?") if this person cannot move it.
8. Add a nonverbal gesture with your verbal request (e.g., point to the body part or to your own body). Whether or not this person easily understands and/or produces words, a nonverbal gesture can make it easier for her/him to do focus on the body part.
9. With the palm of your hand, gently but firmly touch or stroke the body part to be moved, to draw this person's attention to that body part when necessary.
10. Stroke, with the palm of your hand, the body part and joint to be moved, firmly but gently, before it is moved by either you or her/him, since the body part might be stiff or uncomfortable. Begin away from the joint or painful area, and stroke toward the joint and painful area.
11. Use warm water or warm, damp washcloths draped on the body part and joint, to reduce discomfort.
12. Remind yourself that this person may be particularly sensitive to touch. Your touch might send sensations such as "pins and needles", "bugs crawling", or "tickling" up and down her/his skin, or be extraordinarily painful or uncomfortable. A soft touch might feel like a hit, or like intense heat or cold. Alert this person that you are going to touch her/him before doing so. Anticipation can help her/him prepare emotionally and help her/his body to reduce the undesired sensation.
13. Minimize the number of times your hand leaves and returns to her/his body, since her/his body may have difficulty adjusting to the initiation of touch.
14. Use the palm of your hand rather than individual fingers when touching to minimize the number of contact points between your hand and her/his body. To complete your grasp on this person's arm, for example, wait until your palm has settled on this person's skin, then keep your fingers together and gently roll your fingers onto more of her/his skin to reduce the discomfort of initiating touch to new parts of her skin.
15. Use a gentle but firm pressure when touching, when light touch seems to be particularly uncomfortable. Avoid applying so much pressure that your touch hurts this person.