

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

III. BODY LANGUAGE

Look for ways to:

- Use my body to communicate with this person
- Avoid unintentionally communicating the wrong messages with my body
- Compensate for this person's sensory and cognitive changes by how I position and move my body

A. Do I use my body to communicate with this person, such as using facial expressions and hand gestures with my words to help her/him understand?

1. Use all of your body to communicate.
2. Avoid relying simply on words or tone of voice to get your message across, since this person may depend on watching your lips, face, hands, and the rest of your body to interpret what is difficult to hear (due to normal age related hearing loss) or understand (due to brain changes).
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.

B. Is my body telling this person what I want it to say? Do I avoid gestures or facial expressions that could be misinterpreted? For example, do I raise my eyebrows rather than frown when I want to show concern?

1. Be aware of what your body is communicating.
2. Watch this person to see if you are unintentionally communicating a message, or communicating in a way that distresses or confuses her/him. For example, a frown could be interpreted as anger or anxiety, rather than concern.
3. Avoid making your gestures so big they confuse or distract this person.

C. Do my body, face, eyes, and words all match? For example, do I avoid moving too quickly while using soothing words and smiling?

1. Be consistent with your body, words, and voice, so they all communicate the same message and level of calmness and intensity.
2. Avoid confusing this person with mixed messages: be aware of your body, especially when you feel rushed, tense, irritated, or impatient.
3. Remind yourself that if you speak soothing words and smile while your body is tense and moving quickly, this person will likely respond to the tension in your body rather than your words or smile.

D. Do I place myself so this person sees and notices me easily?

1. Quietly position yourself close to this person so she/he sees you before you speak.
2. Approach and position yourself in the part of this person's visual field that is most effective for her/him, since there may be visual problems, or this person's brain may not be able to tell this person to notice everything in her/his visual field,
3. Approach and position yourself on this person's stronger side, particularly if one side of her/his body is weaker than the other side due to a stroke or damage to one side of the brain.
4. Approach and position yourself in front of this person, if both sides of her/his body are equal in strength.
5. Place your face at eye level with this person, whether she/he is standing, sitting, or lying down.
6. Avoid holding an object too close to this person's torso (i.e., too low in the visual field).

E. Do I change positions and gesture slowly and as little as possible?

1. Remind yourself that this person is likely not seeing where objects are in space in the same way you are.
2. Move and gesture only when necessary, to avoid tiring her/him unnecessarily, even when this person can perceive relatively correctly.
3. Move and gesture slowly to make it easier for her/him.

F. Am I at eye-level with this person, such as sitting to interact?

1. Stay at eye-level when interacting with this person, whether she/he is standing, sitting, or lying down, so she/he can see and respond to you more easily.
2. Sit rather than crouch, to show more respect and to feel more relaxed.

G. Do I make and keep eye contact with this person?

1. Maintain eye contact with this person when interacting, so you can keep her/his attention.
2. Watch this person's eyes and face, so you can see more easily how she/he is responding to what you are saying or doing.
3. Use eye contact to show you are giving this person your full attention.
4. Show compassion and respect with your eyes.
5. Position yourself close to this person, so she/he can watch your eyes and face to better understand what you are saying, especially when she/he is hard of hearing or having difficulty processing your words.

H. Do I touch this person while talking, when appropriate?

1. Remind yourself that all touch is a form of communication, even when it is careless or unintentional.

2. Touch this person as appropriate, to help her/him understand what you are saying or doing.
3. Touch this person's body part, when talking about the body part (e.g., when asking her/him to lift an arm or when asking if she/he is in pain).
4. Use touch to communicate comfort and reassurance and to help calm her/him,
5. Use touch to keep this person's attention.
6. Touch this person to feel her/his reaction to what you are saying or doing (e.g., stiffening or increased tension in a body part).
7. 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.
8. Watch this person to see how she/he responds to touch. If she/he is very sensitive to touch, then avoid touching or try touching using the palm of your hand with gentle sustained firmness.
9. Remind yourself that discomfort with touch 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. 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 at this time.
10. Go slowly enough to allow this person time to prepare for your touch.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.

I. Do I model the task and positive behaviors?

1. Remind yourself, that this person may be able to better understand what to do by watching you, rather than listening to your words.
2. Show this person how to act or do a task.
3. Do the task with this person (e.g., wash her arm while she is also washing her arm).
4. Model the task for her/him (e.g., sit beside her/him and wipe a placemat while she/he wipes another placemat).
5. Avoid expecting this person to act a certain way or perform a task when you are doing something different. For example, during a meal, sit down and eat your meal at the same time she/he is eating. Have the food already at the table, so that there is less need for you to stand or walk around.
6. Remind yourself that this person's feelings may reflect events and the feelings expressed in the environment. If the environment around this person is calm and comfortable, she/he will more likely feel calm and comfortable.
7. Avoid mirroring this person's emotional state, particularly if she/he is anxious or distressed. Look and sound calm and in control to communicate reassurance.