



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**

OLDER ADULTS

## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

Families are stronger when they share emotions and listen to each other while showing empathy and compassion. Miscommunication between adult children and their parents can cause conflict and misunderstanding. Communicating well with older adults requires adult children to better understand what their aging parents are going through. Listening carefully to the needs and feelings of others helps us to better understand each other and better manage difficult times.

### Validating While Listening

Validating is an important step in active listening. When we validate the feelings of others, we acknowledge that their feelings are worthwhile and important. Validating the thoughts and feelings of older adults helps to restore their dignity and self-worth. Validation happens as we listen closely and show that we care about what others are saying. Listening to others as they talk about their experiences can sometimes be difficult and very emotional, but it is an important part of helping them feel safe and heard.

### Active Listening Techniques

- **Pay attention.** Give the speaker your undivided attention and recognize that non-verbal communication speaks loudly.
- **Show that you are listening.** Use your body language and gestures to show that you are engaged by nodding occasionally and using facial expressions.
- **Provide feedback.** Reflect on what is being said and respond by paraphrasing. “What I am hearing is...,” or “Sounds like you are saying...,” are examples of how to reflect back on what was said. You can also ask open and honest questions. Use “I” statements.
- **Defer judgement.** Allow the person talking to finish their story or finish what they are trying to say without interruptions. Deeply listening to another person is designed to encourage respect and understanding. It may also help you to gain new information and possibly hear another perspective. Treat the other person in a way that you would want to be treated.

The above techniques were adapted from [Active Listening: The Art of Empathetic Conversation](#).

### Additional Resources

- The Institute on Aging’s guidance on active listening: [Active Listening: How Caregivers Can Make Communicating with Older Adults Easier](#).
- Validation therapy and Alzheimer’s: [Namoi Feil, Validation Therapy, and Alzheimer’s](#).
- A video about communication through empathy: [Validation, Communication Through Empathy](#).

To learn more about the science behind effectively communicating with older adults, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Validation Therapy for Dementia](#)