



Between Friends

Thoughts on Caregiving
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Watch Your Language!

Our choice of words can positively or negatively affect our communication. Common sense stuff, of course, but...

Consider diaper vs. incontinence pad. I don't know about you, but the thought of wearing a diaper as an adult just isn't very dignified. It's no wonder that our family members – with or without memory loss – often fight the idea of wearing one. The term “pad” may be more acceptable (and certainly less embarrassing) – particularly for women, who may be used to menstrual pads. “Protection” may be more acceptable to some. It's also okay to refer to an incontinence pad by its brand name, if that has any meaning to the person.

Bib is another one of those words. Bibs are adorable on babies, but they just don't seem very dignified for adults. Think about those tacky, plastic lobster bibs given in restaurants. Feel comfortable or dignified wearing one? Nope. The term “cover-up” or “apron” may be more acceptable for people in need of protecting their clothes when eating or drinking. Also, try to find less frilly patterns for men –

solid colors or stripes instead of hearts and flowers, please!

Nap is another one of those words. Some people may be offended if you suggest they take a nap, or may equate naptime with babies. “Rest time” may be more acceptable, and may result in less resistance to an occasional or regular snooze.

Getting a person who needs assistance to accept help in the restroom can also be a challenge. The first challenge is in knowing the right term to use – particularly when dealing with someone who is memory-impaired.

Each of us has our own preferred, most comfortable or familiar word – restroom, bathroom, potty, “the head.” We may meet with resistance if we use a word that is no longer familiar to the person in need of assistance.

Toileting is a very personal activity. To need help after handling such an everyday event on our own for most of our lives can be very unsettling.

People may be embarrassed to ask for help. They may try to do things on their own – with limited

success. Or they may postpone asking for help until it's too late, and an accident occurs.

The best rule in dealing with toileting assistance is “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And be as discreet as possible. If you speak very loudly and say “Harold, do you need to go to the bathroom?” or, “Harold! You smell terrible! We need to clean you up,” then Harold may be mortified, resist your efforts to help, and may even have a few choice words for you.

Needing help before or particularly after a bladder/bowel accident occurs is as frustrating and embarrassing for the care receiver as it is for the caregiver.

Be discreet. Remove the person matter-of-factly from the room. If you stay calm, and can maintain your sense of humor, things will go much more smoothly. Think about how you would like someone to assist you if you were the one needing assistance.

Sometimes, you can be the one with the need – have the person accompany you to the restroom. She/he may be more willing to go if you're the one with the need.

A Friend's House Adult Day Services

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