

# Chapter Two: Communication Skills and the Older Adult

## Tips for Communicating Verbally

Effective communication with the client is important and can mean the difference between the client agreeing to submit an application or refusing to do so. The following strategies will help outreach workers communicate effectively with older adults:

- Build rapport with a client.
  - ▶ Consider using an “insider” or group/organization that the older adult trusts, such as a local congregate dining site. To find out where the congregate dining sites are in your county, contact your Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and ask to speak with the elderly nutrition program manager; they will let you know about the providers in the area that can link you with the congregate meal sites. You can also check the AAA website in your county. Encourage and educate site coordinators about CalFresh prior to your outreach event. This way, coordinators can inform the participants that you are coming and assure them that you are trustworthy members of a legitimate organization.
- See *Older Adults Appendix B* for the local AAA in your county. The AAA or their website can refer you to the nearest congregate meal site.
- Be compassionate and patient.
  - Keep it simple.
  - Avoid using technical terms.
  - Speak slowly, clearly, and loudly.
    - ▶ Enunciate difficult words. Don’t mumble.
    - ▶ Avoid placing your hand over your mouth. Many older adults read lips.
  - Avoid using the term “Food Stamps.” Many older adults view Food Stamps as welfare and are too proud to apply for benefits. Consider using some of the techniques in “Promoting CalFresh to Older Adults” in Chapter Four, to help address older adults’ concerns.
  - Refer to older adults as “individuals over the age of 60” rather than as “seniors” or “elderly.” This population sees themselves as active, vital participants in the community.

## Tips for Creating Written Materials for Older Adults

- Use larger font sizes for written materials.
  - ▶ Written materials: type size 12, 13, or 14 point, depending on font type<sup>14</sup>
  - ▶ Presentations or demonstrations: type size 32 point<sup>15</sup>
- Use serif typefaces, which are easier for the eye to read. Examples of serif typeface include Georgia, Times New Roman, and Minion Pro.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> National Institute of Health, “Making Your Printed Materials Senior Friendly. Tips from the National Institute on Aging,” Department of Health and Human Services, October 2007. <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/making-your-printed-health-materials-senior-friendly>

<sup>15</sup> World Blind Union, “How to Make Visual Presentations Accessible to Audience Members with Print Impairments,” 2007. <http://www.miusa.org/idd/resources/files/accessibilityresources/worldblindunion/view>

<sup>16</sup> National Institute of Health, “Making Your Printed Materials Senior Friendly. Tips from the National Institute on Aging,” Department of Health and Human Services, October 2007. <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/making-your-printed-health-materials-senior-friendly>

- Use dark type against a light background or black type against a white background, as the contrast is easier for the eye to read. Avoid using yellow, blue, and green colors within close proximity of one another.
- Use lots of white space. White space allows the eye to read naturally and helps focus readers' attention.

Remember these five guidelines when developing written materials and presentations:

1. Be precise.
2. Keep it short.
3. Make it easy to understand.
4. Use everyday language.
5. Focus on action steps.

For more tips on creating written materials for older adults, refer to the National Institute of Health's publication, *Making Your Printed Health Materials Senior Friendly: Tips from the National Institute on Aging*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/making-your-printed-health-materials-senior-friendly>



### Tips for Selecting Clip Art or Photos

- Choose pictures of young, vibrant, healthy older adults.
- Consider including pictures of grandparents with their grandchildren, as there are older adults that are raising their grandchildren.
- Choose pictures with mixed groups of friends, not just couples. Statistically, women live longer than men and make up a larger percentage of the older adult population.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, "The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors. USDA SNAP. Engaging Special Populations. Senior Outreach," 2011. Accessed March 9, 2012, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/tool-kits.htm>