

## Cultural Diversity and Caregiving

### Care Partner Tool Kit

Beliefs around caregiving issues can vary among cultures. Many have specific expectations and beliefs when it comes to caring for an older family member. Caring for the elderly is often a top priority. An understanding and appreciation for the person you are caring for or your loved one's culture will help you offer better care and support as a caregiver/care partner. This Quicksheet is meant to offer you tools and tips on taking care of a loved one who is from a culture or family system different from you.

#### **Communication**

Effective communication is one of the most important issues when caring for people. Remember to keep it super simple. Below are some helpful tips on communication with a loved one with a different cultural background from our own.

- Verbal communication- If your loved one has a chronic illness, their language skills can/will become impaired. As their health declines they could return to their first language if they speak more than one. If possible, enlist an interpreter when needed. To help with communication, you may use signs with pictures, or have them write it down.
- In some cultures, it is considered polite to answer yes and saying no is an indication of being rude. What we deemed appropriate could be offensive or of great insult to another individual from another culture, so it is best to just ask.
- Nonverbal Communication- In some religious and social cultures direct eye contact and touching is considered disrespectful. While speaking with your loved one, make quick eye contact and once you have their attention, lower your eyelids, or look away while talking. For touching, men and women often touch each other in very limited situations.
- Until you learn more about your loved one or caree's cultural background or family system, you can opt for a conservative approach. But take time to learn what is appropriate.

#### **Cultural Beliefs about Family Roles**

Your loved one is unique! In most cultures adult children are expected to show honor, love, and respect to the elderly by looking after them. Some cultures have expected gender specific roles within the family that may affect caregiving. When speaking with family, make sure you understand the social norms of your loved one's background to avoid any unintentional distress.

- In some cultures, the oldest child is expected to provide care and make the final decisions that affects the family. In other cultures, the eldest male (may not be the eldest child) is responsible for decisions within the family.
- In some cultures, value is placed on the caregiver to respect and care for his or her own mind and body. Find out if carees background has values in which self-care plays an important role.
- Keep in mind that every person has their own personal interpretation of their culture or how their family system works with roles and expectations around caregiving. For example, gender role expectations are not always related to culture but to personal choice within the family.

### **Cultural Beliefs about Health, Death, and Dying**

There are some cultures that have specific beliefs about health, death, and dying. In some cultures, older people generally care about maintaining the quality of their lives. They are not preoccupied with death rather embracing what's to come. Below is a list of some beliefs people you care for or family members may hold that can affect caregiving.

- Talking out loud about the illness or disease brings bad luck. Or talking about someone's silliness can bring illness to the speaker or the speaker's family. The older family members may believe this is a part of aging or they are just acting crazy.
- If the mind is affected, it can put shame or guilt on the family of the person who is ill. Most families will keep the serious illness or disease a secret from the outside so shame will not be brought upon the family.
- It is possible one may end up caring for a loved one without the assistance of his or her relatives. The culture beliefs your loved one's family has may prevent any assistance being rendered by them. If possible, discuss with other people consider themselves part of the same culture how you might invite the relatives to become involved or contribute to the caregiving.

### **Cultural Beliefs about Counseling**

Getting help outside of the home may be considered a source of shame for the caregiver or care recipient. It could be classified as "loss of face" in some cultures or family systems. The caregiver or care recipient may start dealing with depression or grief but avoid seeking help due to fear. Below are reasons why the caregiver or care recipient may avoid seeking help.

- The caregiver may have a fear of hurting the family's image, reputation, and invading the family's privacy. The relatives do not want the family exploited or exposed to a stranger.
- Having a fear of being judged for being weak or losing control of their emotions. Or fear of showing his or her strong-even painful emotions to another person outside of the family. Within some cultures or family systems, it is not acceptable to show emotions, especially for the men. It is a sign of weakness.
- Fear of self-esteem dwindling, and self-image is no longer being thought of as being able to "tough it out" or handle problems on his or her own by family members. If you recognize your loved one or a caregiver struggling, seek out professional help. If there is a caregiver support

group, therapists within the same culture, or therapist who can help identify the stigma surrounding care. This will allow them to create strategies for dealing with stigma and depression/grief.

### **Longevity, Culture and Faith**

For additional perspectives related to longevity, see the webinar series [Longevity around the World](#) from the [Presbyterian Older Adult Ministry Network](#).

- **The Circle of Life** – Presented by Rev. Fern Cloud of Pejuhutazizi Presbyterian Church in MN and citizen of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Oyate.
- **Older Adults of Hispanic Heritage** – Presented by Rev Ida Rosario of Brentwood Presbyterian Church, NY.
- **Korean Milestone Birthdays, Immigrants and Korean American Church** – Presented by Rev. Jae Kim of New Blessing Church in GA.

This Quicksheet is part of the [Care Partner Tool Kit](#) where you can find additional Quicksheets on other Care Partner topics and a Resource Roadmap with websites and books. For additional resources see the resource library page for the partners in this project [POAMN \(www.poamn.org\)](#) and [APCE \(www.apcenet.org\)](#) or the [Office of Christian Formation \(www.pcusa.org/formation\)](#)

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