



## Communication: Respect in the Workplace Give It, Get It

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Define respect.
2. Discuss the importance of respect in the workplace.
3. Identify behaviors that help to promote a respectful work environment.

As a home health aide, your work setting is unique, compared to that of many other healthcare providers. You do not spend the entire work day in the same location, working with and interacting directly with other staff members. But respectful, effective, and appropriate interaction with other staff members, whether in person, on the phone, or by text, is still an important part of your job. This may include getting your assignments, interacting with the nurse about your client's needs, coordinating client care and scheduling with others, or attending staff meetings and inservices.

This newsletter will discuss respect in the workplace, its definition, importance, and behaviors that can promote or undermine it.

### The Importance of Respect

Respect can be defined as thoughts, feelings and behaviors that show value and esteem for others. More generally, respect is treating others (and yourself!) with consideration.

Respect is essential if we, as people, are to effectively interact, work together and reach common goals in any area of life. These goals may be work-related (providing safe and effective client care), family-centered (having a stable, fulfilling partnership, raising healthy children), or social in nature (having fulfilling and supportive friendships).

Studies on civility in the workplace show that rudeness and disrespect

have increased significantly in the last two decades. In one recent study, 98% of those polled had experienced rude behavior in the workplace, and half were treated rudely at least once a week. This results in decreased work effort, performance and quality, as well as lost work time and health problems. Disrespectful behaviors in the workplace cost businesses a great deal of money. In one major company alone, annual costs of poor behavior were calculated at \$8 million. Workplace rudeness also spreads. The stress it causes can spread to the worker's home and family, who may then take this stress to their jobs.

### Being Respected

Before considering the degree of respect you receive from others, think about the respect you have for yourself. Self-respect means trusting and liking yourself, treating yourself with kindness and compassion, and staying true to your values and principles. It is not affected by success or failure. This is very different from self-esteem, which is based on achievement, comparison with others, and holding oneself in high regard. Having self-respect promotes respect from others.



Your words and actions in the workplace can heavily influence the respect that others show toward you. In some cases, even "nice" behaviors can actually decrease the respect that others have for you. To promote respect from others:

*Show confidence:* Good posture, a relaxed smile, taking pride in your appearance, and avoidance of fidgeting help to portray confidence. Speak with confidence, such as “Posting the assignments here will protect client confidentiality”, rather than, “What about posting the assignments here?” You don’t need to say much, but make what you say count.

*Avoid always saying yes:* It is important to work well with your team and to help co-workers. However, do not allow others to use you as the dumping ground for their tasks or requests, simply because they know you’ll always say yes. If a co-worker asks you to switch work days, and it’s not convenient for you, don’t be afraid to say no; “So sorry, but I’ve got plans for that day.”

*Don’t choose actions just so others will like you:* Bringing coffee and snacks for your co-workers at every meeting so that they’ll “like” you does not promote respect for you.

*Stop saying “I’m sorry” by reflex:* Save “I’m sorry” for the times you truly need it. Saying it reflexively many times a day (Sorry to bother you... sorry, I dropped my pen... ) leads others to believe your self-confidence, and self-respect, are low.

*Manage your emotions:* People who are highly reactive, quick to yell, cry, blame, or verbally attack, are rarely respected. Practice maintaining a calm, even demeanor to help you maintain control and be more effective in difficult situations.



*Show respect for others:* People who want respect from others must show respect for others—sometimes first!

*Have a plan for disrespectful behavior:* There are a number of ways to manage people who behave rudely. If possible, avoid the person to decrease the time spent around him or her. The incidents can be documented and, if necessary, reported. This serves to create a history and may result in action from supervisors. If you feel comfortable doing so, you can discuss the behavior with the person doing it, in a non-confrontational way. And of course, if behavior ever crosses the line from simply “rude” to bullying or harassment, document and report this according to your facility’s policies.

### **Being Respectful**

Everyone bears responsibility for promoting respect and civility in the workplace. Don’t fall into the vicious cycle of refusing to be respectful of others when they’re not respectful of you. It takes someone to go first, so make it a goal to treat others

respectfully, even if they’re not as considerate of you. In many cases, their behavior may change for the better. And even if it doesn’t, your respectful behavior allows your dignity and self-respect to remain intact, rather than sinking to their level.

Be sensitive to the fact that cultural differences can determine whether a behavior is considered respectful or not. Making eye contact when talking with someone is considered respectful in Western cultures, such as the US. But in other cultures, avoidance of eye contact shows respect for superiors. And to some degree, respect is also determined individually— one person may feel that someone’s behavior is honest and blunt, while another may describe the person’s behavior as rude and disrespectful.

Consider these tips in showing respect for others:

*Use good manners:* The basics are always appropriate, such as using please, thank you and excuse me. Make eye contact when talking with people, and respond promptly to any questions or comments. And when someone says, “Thank you”, respond with “You’re welcome” rather than “No problem”, which can sound rude and condescending.



*Be considerate of others:* When you are together with other staff members, be aware of the effect that your actions have on others. If you want to adjust the temperature or lighting, ask others in the area if they mind. Don’t make unwelcome noises around others, such as constant humming, snapping gum, or popping your knuckles. If you store food in the staff refrigerator, remove it before it spoils. Clean up after yourself promptly after eating, and of course, never take food that isn’t yours. If you use the last of anything, whether it’s coffee from the staff pot or paper in the copier, make sure to replenish the supply. And, do not engage in gossip or criticize people behind their back.

*Keep an open mind:* Don’t make judgements about people that may affect how you perceive and treat them. Is your new co-worker aloof and unfriendly, or just a quiet, shy person?

*Listen more than you speak:* You’ll learn much more about someone by listening, rather than speaking. Listening and paying attention to others, without interruption, helps them to feel respected.

When colleagues work together to create a more respectful environment, everyone wins, with improved job satisfaction, productivity, and client care.



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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

- \_\_\_\_ 1. Which of the following best defines respect?
  - A. being impressed with someone's achievements
  - B. showing value and esteem for others
  - C. being careful not to offend others for fear of how they'll react
  - D. having high self-esteem
  
- \_\_\_\_ 2. Studies show that rude and disrespectful behaviors in the workplace have decreased in the last two decades, probably due to increased awareness of political correctness and harassment policies.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
- \_\_\_\_ 3. A lack of respect in work environments often causes which of the following for the affected business?
  - A. no apparent effects
  - B. increased quality of work
  - C. increased productivity
  - D. increased costs
  
- \_\_\_\_ 4. Stress from workplace rudeness can spread to homes and other businesses.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
- \_\_\_\_ 5. Difficult interactions with others at work can have a significant impact on an employee's:
  - A. performance
  - B. stress level
  - C. health
  - D. all of the above

- \_\_\_6. Self-respect is:
- A. the same as self-esteem
  - B. affected by comparison with others
  - C. trusting and liking yourself
  - D. based on successes and failures in life
- \_\_\_7. Actions that help to earn respect from co-workers include all of the following EXCEPT:
- A. speaking with confidence
  - B. showing respect for others
  - C. maintaining a calm demeanor
  - D. doing things so others will like you
- \_\_\_8. When interacting with a co-worker who is being disrespectful, the appropriate response is to:
- A. treat the co-worker with respect
  - B. use the same behaviors that the co-worker is using
  - C. display a lot of emotion, such as yelling, to make the co-worker aware
  - D. act in a submissive manner, to avoid worsening the situation
- \_\_\_9. The same behavior may be considered respectful in one culture, but disrespectful in another.
- A. True
  - B. False
- \_\_\_10. Criticizing someone behind their back is not disrespectful, as long as the person doesn't know about it.
- A. True
  - B. False

