

How to Turn Around a Negative Interaction

Caring for an older adult, whether locally or [from a distance](#), can be rewarding. It can also be extremely difficult. Emotions can get the best of you as you navigate your new role as caregiver or watching your loved one's health fail. Even more so, if your loved one is living with dementia or other neurological disease, you may find yourself face to face with someone who you no longer know.



While every interaction you have with your loved one is important, it can be emotionally detrimental to you both if your conversation ends with frustration, sadness, anxiety, or even anger. Fortunately, there is almost always a way to turn around a negative interaction so that you can both leave the experience feeling safe, calm, and valued. Here are a few of our tips for turning around an interaction that might be going downhill.

Validate those feelings.

Older adults are often put in a position when they feel that their feelings or opinions are not taken into consideration. This can be especially true with seniors living with dementia. If you have never worked with someone with dementia, let us tell you that the key is to validate their feelings. Always. Try something like, "Mom, it sounds like you are frustrated right now. I can see that." Or, "You seem lonely right now. How can I help?"

Switch subjects.

If your conversation is headed in a negative direction, validate the feelings and then switch subjects. This works with any adult, including someone with dementia. Consider saying, "I'm sorry we aren't on the same page right now. Let's try something else for a little while. How was your walk this morning?"

Head outside.

If switching subjects doesn't work, try a switch of scenery and head outside. There's something about the fresh air that can give a change in perspective to you and your loved one. Take a deep breath and make a conscious effort to start the interaction again, with a new subject.

Engage in a new activity.

If you are feeling sad or if your loved one is feeling frustrated, stop what you are doing and try something new. Engaging in an activity together is a wonderful way to foster a connection and reset the mood of the interaction. Try turning on music, picking up a photo album, shucking corn, or making a snack.

Try a change of face.

Sometimes, a change of face is more effective than anything, especially when you have tried other tactics to turn around a conversation. If you can do so safely, leave the room and send in another family member or friend to connect with your loved one. Even better, send in your [Visiting Angels caregiver](#) to try a new approach; this can diffuse your frustration and any other emotions that might be running high during an uncomfortable situation.

Let it go.

Everyone has a conversation or interaction go poorly every once in a while. As you leave your loved one's home – or as you hang up the phone after a call – try to find the positive things that happened during that interaction and let any sadness or negativity go. You can try again next time, and hopefully will have a better go. Practice makes perfect, but not every conversation will be ideal. Stick with it and know when to let feelings of anxiety or unmet expectations go.

Ready to read more about senior issues that pertain to you or your loved one? Curious about other senior topics and challenges? [Check out our Family Resource Center](#) for insightful articles, caregiver tips and other important resources.

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