

## COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

When living with a chronic illness, you may have less capacity for stress and your emotions may rise to the surface quickly. You may sometimes feel misunderstood by those around you or may feel disbelieved. It can be particularly stressful when your family and friends have expectations that are not in line with your abilities, energy levels and/or tolerance. The following strategies can help you navigate the relationships in your life.

### BRIEFLY EXPLAIN CHRONIC PAIN TO THEM

Talking openly about your pain and its impacts can help you become more accepting of your condition, feel more in control, grow stronger, and help loved ones understand your limits and how they can help.

### BRING YOUR LOVED ONES TO APPOINTMENTS

Just as it can be meaningful for you to hear health care professionals validate your pain experience, your loved ones may also benefit from hearing from your health care providers about your illness and how to best support you.

### MAKE YOUR LIMITS KNOWN

To aid in your healing, it's important to avoid over-committing. Be honest with loved ones and let them know you may experience limitations with particular activities or tasks.

### ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED

Others may have opinions about what you need but ultimately you know yourself best. Ask for what you need and because you deserve help!

### SET BOUNDARIES

It's important to speak up when something isn't working for you in a relationship, especially if it's related to increased pain. This often means setting boundaries and usually involves asking someone to change their behaviour.

This Feedback Formula is a great tool for communicating boundaries:

- When you \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the person's behaviour),
- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the emotion you feel), and the result is \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the effect of you experiencing that emotion).
- Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_ (make your request)?

#### DEAL WITH ADVICE GRACEFULLY

Unsolicited advice, particularly from a loved one who does not have chronic pain, can be very frustrating. Try to find ways to respond that don't drain you of your energy or increase your stress.

#### DON'T TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY

To conserve your power and energy, try not to take things personally. Since you may only have so much energy to expend, it's often not worth getting upset about other people's words behaviour or opinions.

#### CONSIDER YOUR ENERGY LEVELS

Energy is an important resource that needs to be closely guarded. Choose which relationships to give more energy to and which relationships to invest in less.

#### RESOURCES

- <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/communication-strategies/effective-communication-tips>
- <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/support-relationships/four-communication-tools-for-close-relationships>
- <https://community.thriveglobal.com/how-to-explain-chronic-pain-to-family-in-7-simple-steps/>