**Best Practices When Working**

**With African American Families**

**Do’s and Don’ts**

**Do’s**

**Do** take the time to build a relationship of trust with the person whom you are serving. It helps to ask them about their background – history, family, work, experiences, etc. Understand that it may take some time but it is very important.

**Do** take the time to listen and allow the individual to tell *you* what he/she believes they need rather than simply pushing through with your agenda.

**Do** let the consumer know that your goal is not to take them out of their home, but to find resources in order for them to maintain their independence in their home. This should be part of your conversation form the very beginning.

**Do** understand that African American families are very private, and generally prefer to take care of their own. They may not attend programs, support groups or health fairs, but they will likely be available if there is a program happening at their church or other African American organizations that they are associated with.

**Do** consult with the individual and family before you make any decisions on their behalf. Take the perspective that you are partnering with the individual and their family to reach safe and healthy outcome goals.

**Do** when speaking to African American elders, address them using their last name or using a title: Mr. or Ms. in front of their first name (for example “Ms. Hicks or Ms. Clara). For many, it’s a sign of showing respect.

**Do** understand that you might find that the consumer who does not have a spouse will direct you to speak with the eldest son or eldest daughter when it comes to making decisions on their behalf. Understand the person may or may not be the “Power of Attorney,” however the consumer values the knowledge and/or opinion of the other family member and wants to provide that designated person the opportunity to have a “say” in the person’s personal affairs. It’s important to understand cultural family dynamics.

**Do** coordinate appointments considering additional family members, primary caregiver, friend or an informal caregiver.

**Do** understand that when someone opens their home to you that it is an honor/opportunity and that you should always thank the person and their family.

**Do** realize that African American families may not contact you for help until there is a crisis. So understand that they may be contacting you with limited knowledge of Alzheimer’s or dementia or what to do. Also, the disease will possibly be in a later stage.

**Do** be patient. African American families want to make sure that they are still in control of their loved ones needs.

**Don’ts**

**Don’t** disrespect a person’s religious or cultural beliefs by not taking those things into consideration when providing services to them.

**Don’t** make assumptions that the individual is impoverished or indigent based upon where they live.

**Don’t** make assumptions about an individual based upon their level of education or work history.

**Don’t**’ take on a cynical or pessimistic attitude.

**Don’t** hesitate to follow up with the family, because although you may not hear back from them right away, sometimes it takes a few calls or email for them to be comfortable with the help.

\*This document created in collaboration by Stephanie Houston-Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Institute; Andrea Garr-Milwaukee County Dept. on Aging; Linda Bocanegra Johnson-ADRC of Kenosha County; Felicia Elias-ADRC of Racine County; and Gail Morgan and Tasha Orr-Holmes-Alzheimer’s Association.