

TIPS & TECHNIQUES TO INTERACT & COMMUNICATE WITH A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA

Communication and interactions between individuals is a “two-way street”. Not only do we need express ourselves, but we need to understand other people. We must be able to both “send” and “receive” information in order for communication and interactions to be successful.

Alzheimer’s Disease and other related dementias are a type of brain disease and can result in reducing a person’s ability to communicate. It can reduce a person’s ability to both send and receive messages. This often results in significant frustration and stress for both the person with dementia and their caregiver or person with whom they are trying to communicate.

As the person with Alzheimer’s Disease or other related dementia is unable to modify or change the way they communicate due to the brain disease, it is up to the family member, caregiver, or health care professional to utilize a variety of strategies to increase communication, increase understanding and reduce stress and frustration.

There are 4 total pages to this document.

Non-Verbal Communication

- HOW we say something is as important as WHAT we say.
- Person's with Alzheimer's Disease can understand and communicate non-verbally long after written and spoken language is impaired.
- Non-verbal communication includes:
 - Body language (posture, position)
 - Tone of voice
 - Gestures
 - Facial expressions
 - Touch
 - Eye Contact
- Maintain a calm, pleasant approach. The person with dementia will “mirror” your mood.
- Approach the person from the front to avoid startling him or her.
- Establish eye contact when speaking, if it is culturally appropriate to do so.
- Speak at eye level whenever possible. You may have to kneel or sit to be eye-to-eye level.

Verbal Communication

- Use a calm, gentle voice
- Call the person by name and identify yourself
- Use short, simple sentences
- Speak slowly
- Eliminate distracting noises (turn off the T.V., close the door if there are voices in the next room)
- Give one instruction at a time. Use simple 1-2 step requests.
- Allow enough time for the person to respond and repeat if necessary. Some people with dementia need up to 90 seconds to process and respond to you.
- Speak to the person as an adult, even if you use simple language. Do not be disrespectful or “talk down” to him or her.
- Avoid negative words and phrases.
- Use words of encouragement frequently.
- Do not talk louder if someone does not understand.
- Do not ask questions that rely on memory, such as “Do you remember the names of your grandchildren?” “Do you remember me?” “What is my name?” This can be humiliating if the person cannot remember the answer.
- Do NOT say “remember”
- Utilize statements instead of questions. For example, instead of saying “Do you want to take your bath now?” Try saying: “Your bath is ready. Here’s your towel.” Phrasing requests as statements rather than questions can help avoid arguments.
- Avoid giving commands or using a demanding tone
- Reassure. The person may ask the same question over and over again. This can be annoying, but try to understand why the question is being asked. For instance, the person may be worried about missing an appointment or being left behind. Instead of saying: “I just told you! Your appointment is at 2 o’clock!” Try saying: “Don’t worry, I’m going too. I won’t leave without you.”

Validation

- This is a technique which responds to the person's emotion rather than the verbal statement itself.
- This technique may help reduce stress and establish a bond.
- Enter the person's reality - if they think it's 1940, then occasionally it may be appropriate to interact as if it really were.
- Look for feelings behind the words or behavior.
- Empathize
- Be non-judgmental
- Provide reassurance and comfort
- Remain calm
- Allow the person to express negative feelings
- Avoid Arguing About Reality. The person with Alzheimer's Disease will become confused about reality and not be able to separate past from present. He or she may even forget who you are. This can be upsetting. But don't insist on your version of reality- it may just cause more confusion and stress. Decide how important each issue is. If you can "play along", you may spare both of you much frustration. Instead of saying: "You can't call your dad. He's been dead for years!" Try saying: "I'm sure he's not home right now. Let's call him later."

Distraction

- The person may try to do something unsafe, such as leaving the house alone. Arguing may make the situation worse. Instead try distraction. The person may soon forget what he or she had planned to do. Instead of saying: "Where do you think you're going? You can't leave the house by yourself!" Try saying: Before you go, could you just stir this for me for a minute or two?"