



Communicating with someone with Dementia

Before you speak

- Make sure you have the person's full attention
- Try to make eye contact. This will help the person focus on you
- Minimise competing noises, such as the radio, TV, or other people's conversations

How to speak

- Speak clearly and calmly
- Speak at a slightly slower pace, allowing time between sentences for the person to process the information and to respond
- Avoid speaking sharply or raising your voice, as this may distress the person
- Use short, simple sentences
- Don't talk about people with dementia as if they are not there or talk to them as you would to a young child – show respect and patience
- Try to include the person in conversations with others - you may find this easier if you adapt the way you say things slightly; being included in social groups can help a person with dementia to preserve their sense of identity

What to say

- Try to be positive
- Avoid asking too many direct questions, and phrase them in a way that allows for a 'yes' or 'no' answer
- Try not to ask the person to make complicated decisions - giving someone a choice is important, but too many options can be confusing and frustrating
- If the person doesn't understand what you are saying, try to get the message across in a different way rather than simply repeating the same thing - you could try breaking down complex explanations into smaller parts and perhaps also use written words or objects
- As dementia progresses, the person may become confused about what is true and not true. If the person says something you know to be incorrect, try to find ways of steering the conversation around the



subject rather than contradicting them directly; try to see behind the content to the meaning or feelings they are sharing

Listening

- Listen carefully to what the person is saying, and give them plenty of encouragement
- When you haven't understood fully, tell the person what you have understood and check with them to see if you are right
- If the person has difficulty finding the right word or finishing a sentence, ask them to explain it in a different way; listen out for clues
- Pay attention to their body language; the expression on their face and the way they hold themselves can give you clear signals about how they are feeling
- Due to memory loss, some people won't remember things such as their medical history, family and friends - you will need to use your judgment and act appropriately around what they've said - for example, they might say that they have never been here before even though you know they have.

Body language and physical contact

- A person with dementia will read your body language - sudden movements or a tense facial expression may cause upset or distress, and can make communication more difficult
- Make sure that your body language and facial expression match what you are saying
- Never stand too close or stand over someone to communicate - it can feel intimidating

Tips: communicating with someone with dementia and hearing loss

How you can help

- Speak slightly more slowly than usual but try to keep the natural rhythms of your speech
- Do not shout or over-exaggerate words as this will distort your speech



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- Do not cover your mouth as this will interfere with lip-reading - the person should be able to see your face clearly
- Consider the physical environment – make sure the area is quiet and well-lit
- Use visual clues – write your message down if the person is able to read and use objects or pictures to help the person understand

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