



Communication Tips

Use your whole body to communicate.

- Relying solely on words can be very frustrating for a patient with dementia.
- When communicating with your loved one, use facial expressions, tone of voice, and physical touch to help while showing feelings of affection to convey your message.
- Whether you use words or actions to communicate, set a positive mood by interacting with your loved one in a pleasant and respectful manner.

Get your loved one's attention.

- Before communicating with your loved one, address him or her by name and, if necessary, identify yourself.
- Try to maintain eye contact. For example, if your loved one is seated, get down on his or her level so that you can be eye-to-eye.
- Touch is an excellent way to keep someone's attention for short periods of time.
- Make an effort to limit distractions (e.g., turning off the television/radio or shutting the door) before trying to communicate.

State your message clearly.

- Use simple words and sentences while speaking slowly and distinctly in a reassuring tone.
- Try to maintain your pitch and tone at a constant level. Higher and louder voices often convey frustration.
- Use the exact same wording when repeating phrases that your loved one does not understand. If repeating the phrase exactly does not work, wait a few minutes before rephrasing your question/statement.
- Orient your loved one to the present moment by using actual names of people and places. Try "You and I are going out to dinner with our daughter, Mary and her husband, Brian tonight at 6:00," instead of "We're going out to dinner with the kids tonight."



Ask simple, answerable questions.

- Ask one question at a time, and preferably, they should be questions that can be answered with yes/no answers.
- Refrain from open-ended questions or from giving too many choices.

“Listen” patiently with your eyes.

- If your loved one is struggling with an answer, it is okay to suggest words but first give him/her a chance to respond.
- Non-verbal cues and body language may provide hints as to what your loved one is trying to communicate.
- Try to listen for the meaning and feelings that could be at the basis of non-verbal behavior and words.

Use distraction and redirection when necessary.

- Try changing the subject or the environment if it appears that your loved one is becoming upset.
- Before redirecting your loved one, acknowledge the emotion he/she is experiencing.
- Saying something along the lines of “I see that you are frustrated, and I am sorry that you are upset. Let’s go for a walk.” These two sentences accomplish both the necessary acknowledgement and redirection.

Respond with affection and reassurance.

- When your loved one is anxious, confused, and/or unsure of him/herself, you may find that they confuse reality with things that never occurred. Let go of the facts and focus on the feelings your loved one is experiencing.
- When your loved one expresses confusion over facts, the emotions that he/she is expressing usually hold some emotional importance. Respond to your loved one’s feelings with verbal and physical expressions of comfort, reassurance, and support (e.g., holding hands, hugging, and offering praise).

Remember the good old days.



- Avoid asking questions that rely on your loved one's short-term memory.
- Try asking questions about the distant past. You might even try showing your loved one photos of earlier times to try to elicit conversation.

Maintain your sense of humor.

- Try laughing at inconvenience, frustration, or miscommunication to lessen stress and bring you closer to your loved one.
- Most people with dementia maintain their social skills and will be happy to laugh along with you, but make sure that it is never laughter at your loved one's expense.