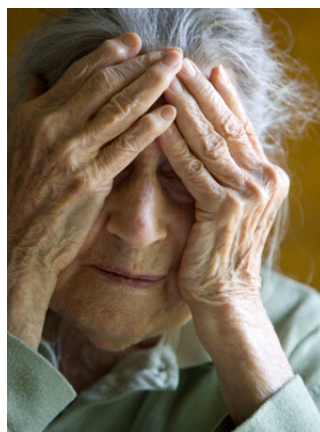


# CAREGIVING WITH DEMENTIA



- **Make eye contact;**
- **Interact at the level of the elder instead of standing over them;**
- **Keep a friendly, non-threatening demeanor;**
- **Never talk down to a person with dementia. They are an adult, so treat them as one;**
- **Gently guide the person with dementia to do what needs to be done, rather than giving them orders;**
- **Do not be angry or upset in front of them. They can easily misinterpret your upset as involving them, upsetting them in the process;**
- **Speak slowly and use as few words as possible in guiding them to do something;**
- **Use hand gestures to help them understand;**
- **Give one step directions until you determine the person can follow more than one at a time (Example 1. Jim, pick up your toothbrush; 2. Squeeze toothpaste onto it; 3. Put the brush in your mouth; 4. Brush up and down.)**
- **Be very patient, giving people with dementia time to process the information, which may be much more slowly than normal;**



## ***Ten Tips For Communicating With a Person Living With Dementia***

- 1. Set a positive mood for interaction** – Your attitude and body language communicate your feelings and thoughts stronger than your words. Set a positive mood by speaking in a pleasant and respectful manner. Use facial expressions, tone of voice, and physical touch to help convey your message and show your feelings of affection.
- 2. Get the person's attention** – Limit distractions and noise. Turn off the radio or TV, close the curtains, shut the door, or move to quieter surroundings. Before speaking, make sure you have their attention. Address them by name and use non-verbal cues and touch to help them stay focused. If seated, get down to their level and maintain eye contact.
- 3. State your message clearly** – Use simple sentences. Speak slowly, distinctly, and in a reassuring tone. Refrain from raising your voice higher or louder (unless you know they have a significant hearing loss). If he does not understand the first time, use the same wording to repeat your message or question. If he still does not understand, rephrase the question and try again. Use gestures to provide additional cues. Use actual names of people and places instead of pronouns or abbreviations.
- 4. Ask simple, answerable questions** – Ask one question at a time; those that can be answered “yes” or “no” work best. Refrain from open-ended questions or giving too many choices. For example, ask, “Would you like to wear your white shirt or your blue shirt? (showing the shirts as you point to them).”

- 5. Listen with your eyes, ears, and heart** – Be patient in waiting for a reply. If she is struggling for an answer, it is ok to suggest words. Watch for non-verbal cues and body language, and respond appropriately. Always strive to listen for the meaning and feelings that underlie the words, even when you do not fully understand them.
- 6. Break down activities into a series of steps** – This makes many tasks much more manageable. You can encourage them to do what they can, reminding them of steps they may forget, and assisting with steps they may no longer be able to do on their own. Using visual cues can be very helpful.
- 7. When the going gets rough, distract and redirect** – If an elder becomes upset, try changing the subject or the environment. For example, ask for his help with something, or suggest going for a walk. It is important to connect with the person on a feeling level before you redirect. You might say, “I see you are feeling sad – I’m sorry you are upset. Let’s go get something to drink.”
- 8. Respond with affection and reassurance** – People with dementia often feel confused, anxious, and unsure of themselves. They may get reality confused on recall things that never really occurred. Avoid trying to convince them they are wrong. Stay focused on the feelings they are demonstrating (which are real) and respond with verbal and physical expressions of comfort, support, and reassurance. Sometimes holding hands, touching, hugging, and praise will get the person to respond when all else fails.
- 9. Remember the good old days** – Remembering the past is often a soothing and affirming activity. Many people with dementia may not remember what happened 45 minutes ago but can clearly recall their lives 45 years earlier. Therefore, avoid asking questions that rely on short-term memory, such as asking the person what they had for lunch. Instead, try asking them general questions about their past, which addresses information they are more likely to have retained, “What was it like when you were a child?”.
- 10. Maintain your sense of humor** – Use humor whenever possible, though not at the person’s expense. People with dementia tend to retain their social skills and are usually delighted to laugh along with you.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**See Video:** [CATEGORY 4-Cognitive Functioning-Video 2-Ex for Communicating With Dementia-\(Communicating Dementia-Communication In Dementia-Teaching Examples For Care Staff\)](#)

**See Video:** [CATEGORY 4-Cognitive Functioning-Video 3-Communication Skills In Dementia-\(Dementia-Communication In Dementia-Tips For Shifting Focus-Tips For Communicating With People With Dementia\)](#)

## THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- For **word retrieval difficulty**, review the information on Aphasia Strategies in the Communication section.
- For improving **focus**, be sensitive to the fact that too much stimulation makes it very difficult for an elder to pay attention to the task at hand, such as eating, communicating a need, etc. Some things you can do:
  - Put them in an area where there are limited distractions, next to a wall or in a quieter room;
  - Consider creating an isolation area if needed with a portable screen or doing a task only in their room;
  - Be sure the lighting is adequate, so that they can focus on where you want their attention;
  - Use visual contrast to make it easier to pay attention to what you want them to focus on (such as a yellow plate on a red placemat);
  - Be very aware of the noise levels. Many people talking at once is distracting for anyone, and especially for someone with problems focusing. Therefore, create a quiet environment. Do not contaminate meal time conversation with noisy music in the background. It is too difficult to focus.

- Practice “focusing” by creating activities that encourage listening. Read a short story and ask questions about what you read. You may want to do this a paragraph at a time, so they can remember.
  - Practice focusing by playing a game where there is noise (like music in the background) and they have to play bingo or a similar game paying attention to your voice to get the right number.
  - In doing games or activities use real items rather than pictures. Three dimensional items are easier to focus on and interpret than are flat pictures.
  - Use “live” entertainment or short videos with good music and a lot of movement. It is next to impossible for a person with focus problems to pay attention to and understand longer movies with a lot of dialogue.
- For improving **Memory**, you can practice remembering things that have value to them and can help identify “memory aids” that can be developed to help them be able to cue themselves. Some things you can do include:
    - Remembering that songs are chained together in a different area of your brain, make up a song and have everyone practice with the elder in helping remember a task. This could be something like the sequence of things to put on, or the sequence of things to wash in the shower. Use a common tune like Row, row, row your boat. Only use one song to cue a task, at least until it is well engrained in their memory. It becomes too confusing to have several songs for several tasks.

- Cue tasks with large written signs, such as “Push button to go to bathroom” or “drink all the water in glass” to cue things you want them to remember to do. Only use a few signs or the effect will become too confusing and it will not work.
- Use a written reminder on a card to answer questions that tend to be repeated over and over again, such as “YOU ARE AT YOUR DAUGHTER’S HOME IN CHATTANOOGA – YOU LIVE HERE NOW” or “YOUR CAR IS BEING TAKEN CARE OF BY YOUR BROTHER – YOU DO NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT IT.” When they ask a question, remind them to look at the card in their pocket. Do this in a kind manner, helping them do it in the beginning and have them read it out loud. Then repeat, “So, your question was ‘Where am I?’ and the answer is...” point to the card and have them read it aloud.
- You can practice focus and memory with a game such as matching cards that you turn over and try to remember where they are to make a match each turn.
- You can practice memory as a group by having the memory task of the “What is happening tomorrow?” – St. Patrick’s Day party; “Who is our new neighbor?” – Jan (would help to have her picture to cue). Do it as a group, then practice trying to get the answer individually. Keep telling them the answer if they cannot think of it. Use the cueing techniques to help if needed.
- Understand their level of frustration in not being able to remember, so never criticize them if they do not.

- Doing **Problem Solving.** Problem solving involves a combination of analysis and sequencing. Analysis determines what is needed while sequencing involves the order in which to take action. You can practice this by:

- Creating a task, and facilitating input as to what to do. Ask questions, and then write the sequence on a white board. Use the written sequence to guide the steps in taking action. This could include things like: making cookies, unlocking a door, sending a letter, etc. Practicing figuring this out helps the elder have confidence that they can do things and renews the process by which problem solving occurs;
- Create household tasks that always have the same sequence, such as setting the table. Figure it out together, write it where it can easily be referred to, then practice it EXACTLY the same way every time the table is set;
- Get the elder's input in developing a cue card for personal tasks they do, such as get up, go to toilet, wash my face, put on clothes, go to breakfast. Help them consistently follow the guidelines written on a board in their room or a card they carry. Everyone needs to consistently follow the same routine in order to help retain this new memory that is being formed.