

Building Relationships with People Living with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias

Resource and Reference

Guidelines for Understanding		Communication Best Practices
Remember: All behaviors have meaning and it can communicate unmet needs. We strive to understand the person, support them and meet the needs.		Be supportive and affirming. Let the person know you are listening and trying to understand. Meet them in the moment and show you care about what they are saying.
✓ Be calm – think before you respond		Offer comfort and reassurance Be present and encouraging. Give time for processing information. Be open to verbal and nonverbal communication.
✓ Come from the front- make sure they see you		Avoid criticizing or correcting Instead of telling a person what is incorrect look for the meaning behind what they are communicating. Repeat back what the person says to support more conversation.
✓ Speak slowly and clearly		Don't Argue! If they say something you don't agree with, let it be. It is not a contest of who is right or wrong. The goal is to support relationship and success.
✓ Be aware of your own body language		Offer a suggestion If the person is using an unclear word offer a possible word or suggestion based upon what they might mean.
✓ Limit distractions in the environment		Encourage Unspoken Communication If you are not sure of the meaning, stay open to the body language. 80 % of communication is nonverbal
		Limit Distractions Set the stage for successful communication by finding a quiet space with good lighting and comfortable places to sit.
Recognizing Pain		Focus on Feelings, Not Facts Sometimes the emotions being expressed are more important than what is being said. Look for the feelings behind the words. Tone of voice may provide many clues to the well-being of the person.
<i>Expressing pain may be difficult for some people living with dementia. If the person does not describe their discomfort in words look for signs and nonverbal expressions of physical distress.</i>		
First, don't assume the person cannot talk about pain. Ask them if they have pain. Ask them to point to the area		
Nonverbal Signs of Possible Pain		
➤ Noisy, heavy breathing	➤ Holding or rocking a part of the body	
➤ Crying out, moaning or groaning	➤ Change of usual activity level	
➤ Facial expressions – clenching teeth, lips or eyes shut tight	➤ Stiff arms or legs	
➤ Self-protective actions like pushing or pulling away		

Communication Best Practices

Start with the assumption

that the person is doing the best that they can...

Identify yourself	Approach the person from the front and say who you are. Keep eye contact. If the person is sitting or lying down- kneel down to eye level or below
Call the person by name	Know the preferred name and use it to build relationship. It also clarifies that you are speaking to them.
Use short, simple sentences	Lengthy requests or instructions can be overwhelming and may create distance in your communication
Wait for a response, don't rush	Be aware of speed and clarity. Use a gentle and relaxed tone. And a lower tone of voice is heard better when we age.
Repeat information or questions	If the person does not respond, wait a moment. Then ask again with the same words.
Avoid confusing and vague statements	Provide the solution rather than ask a question. For example, saying "The bathroom is right here", rather than "do you need to go to the bathroom?"
Turn negatives into positives	Rather than saying "come here.", say, "I need help, would you help me? " Ask if they would try when asking them to do something.
Demonstrate and use visual cues	To help demonstrate the task, point or touch the item you want the person to use or to bring the task with.
Avoid quizzing	This is not a test! Enjoy sharing stories and reminiscing but avoid asking, "do you remember?", or "You know who this is, don't you?", when the person's daughter is walking towards you. Simply say, "it's your daughter, Ellen!"
Write things down	If spoken words are not understood, try writing simple notes. People can often read well into the disease. Also reminder notes may be helpful.
Keep an easy-going manner	Be aware of your feelings and attitude – you may be communicating through your tone of voice. Use positive, friendly facial expressions and nonverbal communication.
Provide unconditional positive regard and reassurances	When the person is anxious or frustrated, take their feelings seriously. This is how they are feeling and we need to take the response seriously. Provide reassurance, kindness, and unconditional positive regard.