

Steps for Positive Physical Approach

It's important to remember that people living with dementia are doing the best they can. We can set the stage for success each time we approach a person by utilizing the following steps of a positive physical approach.

Come from the front

Approach from the front to allows the person to see you coming and to anticipate the interaction. Coming from behind feels abrupt and surprising for anyone, including the person with dementia.

Go slow

Approach slowly, to allow the person to track your movement and anticipate the interaction. Coming up to someone feels sudden and unexpected and can result in a defensive response.

Get to the side

Moving to the side as you approach is a less confrontational way to approach a person living with dementia. It also allows the care partner to protect themselves in the case of a person striking out.

Get low

Eye contact is key and getting low allows you to be at the same level as the person, equalizing the power in the conversation.

Offer your hand

Offering your hand is a warm, universal sign of friendship and relationship. When you offer your hand, it will often be met with a smile in positive anticipation of the interaction.

Call them by name

Calling the person by name further affirms the connection and the safety felt in the interaction. Even if they don't know who you are, the fact that you know who they are, supports a positive interface.

Teepa Snow, Accepting the Challenge, Eastern North Carolina Alzheimer's Association

WAYS OF HELPING

Visual Cues

- Make eye contact, smile
- Use written schedules, notes, reminders
- Label areas and items with simple words to prompt
- Use pictures to remind about what is hidden
- Put things in view one at a time if they are to be used
- Use props to focus or provide choices
- Use gestures and pointing
- Use demonstration – show what you mean by doing it yourself

Verbal Cues

- Use the person's preferred name
- Keep information simple and short
- Say what's going on
- Offer simple choices
- Ask for help
- Ask to try
- Break requests into simple steps
- Always give positive feedback and praise

Tactile (Touching) Cues

- Shake hands to start
- Offer a hug or hand-holding if the person is distressed
- Touch for attention during tasks
- Guide movement – lead the person through once
- Do the harder parts of the task, have them do the easier ones
- Hand-under-hand assistance
- Be careful about rushing to doing for – let the resident do as much as they are capable of for themselves. Even if you need to initiate the task, they may be able to take over once they get it.

