

# Communication



Good communication is an important part of living well after a diagnosis of dementia. It helps someone with dementia to keep a sense of self, sustain relationships and maintain the best quality of life.

The world of a person with dementia is most likely not the same world in which their families, friends and caregivers live in. Communicating with someone who has dementia can at times be challenging or confusing as the dementia will gradually affect the way a person communicates and behaves. The ability to present rational ideas will change, one is easily confused and there is trouble finding words. Ordinary, daily tasks may have become challenging and even inappropriate outbursts are normal and can occur.

Most important is to keep a calm atmosphere and give the person with dementia the change to think independently without overwhelming them with demands.

The following tips can help to have the best possible communication with someone who has dementia. And of course, always remember that every person is unique and should be approached in their own, personal way!

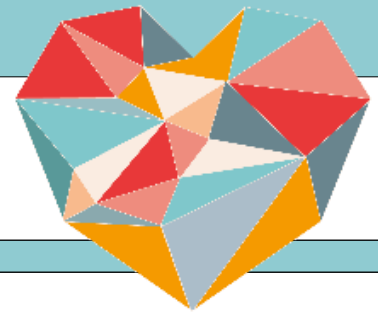


*Forget dementia, remember the person*



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# 8 Communication tips for a person with dementia



## Get the person's attention

Before you speak, call the person by name and tell who you are. Make eye contact. Eye contact shows you care about what he or she is saying. If the person is seated, get down on the same level and maintain eye contact. Avoid distracting environments and eliminate noise interference.



## Simple words & short questions

Speak slowly and use words that are familiar, using a relaxed and reassuring tone of voice. Tone matters so avoid a high and loud voice. Don't ask too many questions. Keep it to minimal choices ("would you like coffee or tea?"). Ask one, short question at a time and wait for the response.



## Patient is key

Calmly wait as the person searches for words and give them time to respond. People with dementia might need a little extra time so don't rush them. And if they don't respond, no problem and simply move on to a different topic. Watch for nonverbal cues and body language and consider the emotion or intent behind the words. Respond with warmth and acknowledge feelings.



## Positive attitude

Speak positively and accept that not everything has to be right in a conversation. It makes little sense to correct or disagree so don't be too strict on facts. Remember to give compliments to enhance their feeling of acceptance and self-esteem. Use facial expressions and physical touch to support your message and show your feelings of affection and understanding.



## Break down activities

Divide an activity into a series of steps and avoid complicating tasks. Present clear and simple steps to follow. Do things together and show these steps. Give the other person time and give compliments if things go well. Don't give instructions or information too far in advance.



## Respect and dignity

Always treat the person with dignity and respect. While their behaviour may seem childlike, remember that you are communicating with an adult. Avoid talking down to the person or as if he or she isn't there. Talk with them, not to them and avoid childish phrases.



## Enjoy the unexpected

Sometimes a conversation takes a surprising turn due to an spontaneous funny remark or a gesture. Go along with the situation and enjoy it together! Maintain your sense of humour and use it where possible. Humour is a great tool and can add to the happiness of the both of you.



## Different forms of communication

Communication is more than just speaking. It does not always have to be a conversation with people talking. Singing a song together, watching photos, gently massaging hands or just sitting quietly next to each other are also ways of communicating and making contact.

