



## COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR PERSON WITH DEMENTIA

- Speak slowly and clearly using short simple sentences. Do not expect a quick response. Give the person time to process the information.
- If it is necessary to repeat statements, use the same words. At first, do not rephrase sentences or use different words.
- The tone of your voice and facial expressions is as important as what you say. Use a normal tone of voice and a calm manner. Persons with dementia can be sensitive to body language as well as tone of voice even if they can't understand what is being said.
- Stand in front or in the direct line of vision of the person. Touch an arm or shoulder gently to get or keep attention. Sustain eye contact.
- Present only one idea at a time. Do not try to give too much information in one sentence.
- Use gestures and visual clues or aids to get across your messages. Try using more than one of these senses to communicate, such as touching as well as talking. Do not use gestures to threaten the person.
- Avoid questions whenever possible, such as quizzing the person on names of family members. Not knowing the answers embarrasses the person. It may be helpful to cue the person with the necessary information, such as supplying the names.
- Only offer simple choices.
- Discuss only concrete actions and objects.
- Use direct statements to initiate action, such as "It's time to take a bath", or "Let's get dressed now".
- Understand that the person with Alzheimer's may say one word and mean another. You may have to guess at the correct meaning. Try to clarify your guess with the person. You could be wrong.
- Do not assume that the person with dementia can always understand and act on messages, either written or verbal.
- Communicate with the person as much as possible, although a constant stream of conversation is neither helpful nor necessary.



## **THE GOLDEN RULE OF DEMENTIA CARE:**

*He can't change, so change the environment, or change yourself.*

### **1. Remember not to argue**

- a. You are rational and logical but brain damage means the dementia patient isn't.
- b. The time it takes to argue and be defeated can be better spent thinking of solutions.

### **2. Respect and empathize with the person's feelings**

- a. "This must be frustrating. But I think you'll feel better in clean underwear."
- b. "I can see you're upset. I'd be upset too if I thought someone had taken my money."
- c. "It's upsetting when something gets lost. Let me help you look for your wallet".
- d. "I'd be upset too if I didn't get my lunch. Let me see what I can find in the kitchen".
- e. "You must miss your home. Tell me about it. Was it large?"

### **3. Be creative**

- a. Appeal to an absent third party, an authority, if you're having problems.
  1. "The laundry lady is waiting to wash your sheets!"
  2. "I hear the inspection team is coming today, so we'd better get this floor clean."
  3. "Let me help you to the bathroom before your daughter arrives."
- b. Use dementia to your advantage. Wait 10 minutes and try your desired activity again.
  1. Dementia patients sometimes forget an event within five minutes.
  2. Very few things **MUST** be done immediately.
  3. Approach the problem from a different angle when you return.
- c. Use humor to cajole cooperation.
  1. "I guess I'll have to take my bath first" often produces competitive cooperation.
  2. "You look so angry, I brought my smile with me just for you!"
  3. "The newspaper said they're planting rubber trees along the highway to prevent traffic crashes. Isn't that the silliest joke you ever heard?"
- d. Use distraction—try to rely on concrete things rather than abstract ideas.
  1. "I can't leave now, will you go for a walk with me after lunch?"
  2. "Have you seen the rabbit outside? Jan told me they're cleaning his cage."
  3. "They're calling your floor to lunch. Let's get finished so you can go eat."

## **AVOID THESE NEGATIVE RESPONSES**

1. Do not become defensive.
2. Do not ask questions that require explanations, especially "why" questions.
3. Do not belittle or talk down to a demented adult; do not treat him or her like a child.
4. Do not quiz a person with memory loss.
5. Do not disagree, argue or offer opposing ideas.