

# Ten Tips for Communicating with Persons Living with Dementia

*Ever feel like your loved one is ignoring you or that you just weren't getting through to your loved one? Try some of these communication tips to see if they help.*

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1. **Make eye contact.** Always approach them face-to-face and make eye contact. Always approach from the front as approaching and speaking from the side or from behind can startle them. Make sure they actually see you and that their attention is focused on you.
2. **Be at their level.** Move your head to be at the same level as their head. Bend your knees or sit down to reach their level. Do not stand or hover over them – it is intimidating and scary. They can't focus on you and what you are saying if they are focused on their fear.
3. **Reduce the thinking needed to get the message across.** Eliminate “linking” words (and, but, or). Add periods. Offer “guided choices” (When getting dressed, instead of having them choose from the whole closet of close, lay out 2 or 3 garments and ask which of those they would like to wear.). Ask more “close ended” questions (questions that require yes/no answers) vs. open ended that require more thought processing.
4. **Speak calmly.** Always speak in a calm manner with an upbeat tone of voice, even if you don't feel that way. They can sense your feelings even if you don't realize it (think “emotional barometers”). If you sound angry or agitated, they will often mirror that feeling back to you and become anxious, angry or scared.
5. **One step at a time.** Speak slower talking to them. Take a breath between each sentence. They cannot process words as fast as non-diseased people can. Give them a chance to catch up to your words. Don't rush.
6. **Speak in short sentences.** Additionally, speak in short direct sentences with only one idea to a sentence. Usually they can only focus on only one idea at a time.
7. **Only ask one question at a time.** Let them answer it before you ask another question. You can ask who, what, where and when, but NOT why. Why is too complicated. They will try to answer, fail and get frustrated.
8. **Don't say “remember”.** Many times they will not be able to do so, and you are just pointing out to them their shortcomings. That is insulting, and can cause anger and/or embarrassment.
9. **Stay away from “negative words”.** Turn negatives into positives. For example say “Let's go here” instead of “Don't go there”. Try to avoid saying the word “No”. Other ways to say “no”: “If only we could”, or “Could we talk about it next time I come?”
10. **Do not argue with them.** Support their reality. Validate their feelings. It lets them know that they are not alone and then redirect them into another thought. For example “It sounds like you miss your mother (husband, father, etc...). You love them very much, don't you? Tell me about the time...” Then ask for one of their favorite stories about that person).

