

Tips for Communicating with Persons Living with Dementia

What You Should Expect

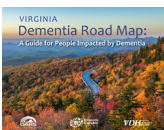
Brain changes due to dementia can make it hard to communicate. The person living with dementia may have trouble saying what they want and understanding what others are saying. Your loved one may not be able to find the right words or may invent new words. They may repeat the same question over and over. Sometimes it may be hard to make sense of what your loved one is saying, and they may have trouble understanding your words. This can be frustrating for both of you and make communication even more difficult.



What You Can Do

- **Be present.** Let your loved one know you're listening and trying to understand. Keep your voice gentle. Hold the person's hand while you talk. Smile, nod, make appropriate eye contact.
- **Show respect.** Offer your loved one undivided attention, don't multi-task. Include your loved one in conversations, don't talk about them as if they weren't there.
- **Avoid distractions.** Background noise, like TVs or radios can compete for attention.
- **Position yourself.** Be close enough to be heard and seen clearly. Sit or stand at the same level, rather than standing over them.
- **Offer comfort.** If a person with dementia is having trouble communicating, let them know it's OK. Offer hugs, or hold hand as appropriate.
- **Use visual cues.** Gestures or other visual cues can help promote better understanding than words alone. Rather than asking if your loved one needs to use the toilet, walk them to the toilet and point to it. Demonstrate a task first.
- **Get hearing checked regularly.** If the person uses a hearing aid, check that it is working and inserted properly. When speaking, turn your face towards them and make sure your face is in the light so they can easily see your lip movements.
- **Keep it simple.** Use short sentences. Ask one question or offer one instruction at a time. It usually helps to use "positives"—say "Let's go here" instead of "Don't go there." As the disease progresses, ask questions that require a yes or no answer.
- **Allow time and be patient.** Slow pace of speech slightly and allow time for the person to process and respond. Try to avoid interrupting. If you're feeling rushed or stressed, take some time to calm down.
- **Focus on feelings.** Listen for the meaning behind the words. Their tone or body language may provide clues. Respond to the emotions.

Remember that these tips are offered as suggestions, and we encourage you to forgive yourself when things don't go as well as you want them to. It can be helpful to talk with others in the same situation to get more ideas and support. For information on support groups or other resources in your area, contact your local Area Agency on Aging or the Alzheimer's Association.



To find your Area Agency on Aging, call 1-800-552-3402
Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline: 1-800-272-3900



The information on this tipsheet is taken from *Virginia Dementia Road Map: A Guide for People Impacted by Dementia*. Download your copy of the Road Map by scanning the QR code or visit: vda.virginia.gov/DementiaCapableVA.htm