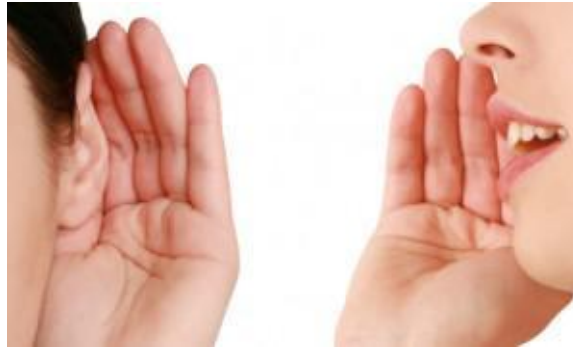


Communication is a two-way process



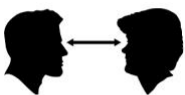
We all need to consider our own communication

- Have we been as clear as possible?
- Is our attitude friendly and helpful?

It's very important to think about how we communicate with people with dementia. Our own communication style can influence whether communication is successful and pleasurable.

Positive Communication Tips

BEFORE YOU START



#hello
my name is...



- Do what you can to address any sensory impairments, such as checking that a hearing aid is working properly, or that glasses are clean.
- Consider the environment. Reduce distractions and noise: turn off the radio or TV and if possible, go to a quiet room.
- Be at the same physical level, use eye contact, use touch if appropriate to the individual.
- Get the person's attention and introduce yourself. Use their preferred name.
- Use a calm & friendly approach.
- If you are using PPE explain why and try to choose transparent equipment so your facial expression isn't hidden.

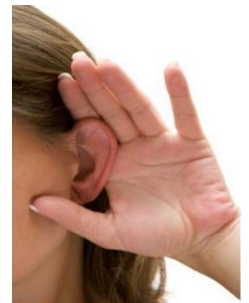
WHEN YOU ARE TALKING

- Demonstrate kindness and respect through non-verbal communication. The expression on your face and the tone of your voice will convey more than the content of your words.
- Use gestures and visual prompts eg photographs, objects, refer to calendars and maps if talking about dates or places. Discuss headlines and pictures in the news to help the person understand what's happening in the world.
- Write down important words as you say them to improve understanding and give a way for your loved one to come back to a topic.
- Take your time, speaking clearly and slowly. Make only one point at a time.
- Use yes/no and choice questions versus open-ended questions eg "Would you like a cup of tea?" Or "Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?" instead of "What would you like to drink?"
- Use names and nouns, avoiding pronouns eg say "Sarah" instead of "she".
- Pay attention to the person's responses and simplify things further or repeat if you need to.
- Ensure that the person has enough time to process what you've said.



WHEN YOU ARE LISTENING

- Listen very carefully. Encourage the person to take their time.
- Establish the topic first to know what they're trying to talk about. "Is this about something you need? No. About a person? Yes. Is it a family member?"
- Show the person, through verbal and nonverbal responses, that you are listening and have time for them.
- Observe everything the person is communicating non-verbally. Look out for their facial expressions and body language - they may give you 'clues' about their feelings and what they want to communicate.
- Avoid assumptions; ask the person to confirm if you're right about any guesses you make about what they are trying to say. Admit when you don't understand and ask if it's okay to come back to the idea later.



- Encourage them to show you what they mean if they can't find the words, and to express themselves in their own way eg. gestures, photographs, objects, drawing or writing.
- Avoid arguing and confrontation; accept different perceptions of time and reality.
- Instead of answering for the person, give time and support to answer. Instead of filling in a word, ask if they want help.

MORE COMMUNICATION TIPS

- Be a good model. If you want the person to use gestures, use gestures yourself.
- Use timing and rhythm in the interactions, create the feeling of taking turns.
- Sing songs together. Search YouTube for the persons favourite songs. Music is powerful!
- Use video calling programs like Facetime or Skype to talk instead of just the phone so you don't miss out on facial expressions and gestures.
- Laugh! Laughter is good medicine, so watch funny videos or simply find ways to laugh together.
- Reminisce by getting out old photos, telling stories, and reliving easier times in life.
- Find new activities that aren't dependent on communication so you can enjoy being together without the stress or struggle.
- Recognise when life gets too frustrating and take a few long, deep breaths together.
- Practice gratitude. When life is hardest is when it's most important to reflect on what you still have, what went well, and what you appreciate.
- Take care of yourself. Caregiving is exhausting. You can't pour from an empty cup, so keep yourself healthy, rested, and supported by your own network as much as possible.

COMMUNICATION IN ADVANCED DEMENTIA

In advanced dementia, the challenge is how to facilitate communication when the person has little or no speech and may only make sounds or repeat isolated words or movements. What we need to remember is that the person will be trying to communicate in other ways.

Get to know the person as much as you can. Try reminiscing about the person's past. Talk to them about things of interest.

Take the person's lead by responding to things they do. This can be by commenting on their actions, joining in with them, playfully imitating them. By responding instead of leading we don't make demands on the person that they cannot cope with. Instead we communicate that we value them and enjoy being with them.

Treat the things the person does as if this is communication. In this way the person is responded to as a communicator and feels included. For example, when the person looks away perhaps they want a break or need time, when they vocalise they may be seeking a response.

Author: Dr Natalie Elliott (National Consultant AHP Lead for Dementia)