

Staying Connected

Tips to help you support a loved one living with dementia

To better understand and support a person living with dementia, it's important to **shift our focus towards their strengths and abilities** rather than solely concentrating on the disease and its limitations.

Dementia is not just memory loss and confusion. Dementia can impact all senses causing distortions in visual perception, difficulties in processing sounds, and alterations in taste, smell, and touch.

Communication changes in people living with dementia may manifest in various ways. Below are some examples of challenges they may experience and how you can support them:

It's possible that when having a conversation with someone living with dementia, the content of their speech may lack meaning or may not make sense to you. If you notice this, think about the following as a way to support them:

Focus on the emotions and intent behind the words rather than the content. Respond empathetically to the feelings expressed. If the person talks about a past event inaccurately, you can validate their emotions by saying, "It sounds like that was a challenging experience".

People living with dementia often face challenges when it comes to finding the right word. Family and friends can help in the following ways:

Be patient and avoid interrupting. Allow the person time to express themselves. You could also ask the person if they would like you to help them find the right word or if they'd like you to give them time to find it for themselves.



People with dementia might find themselves repeating stories, phrases, or questions as a part of their communication challenges.

Remember that for them, each time they tell the story or ask the question, it's the first time. Respond to repeated phrases or questions with patience. Avoid expressing frustration. Instead, gently acknowledge their question or statement.

Sometimes, a person living with dementia may have trouble keeping up with conversation. If you find this is happening with your loved one:

Slow down the pace of the conversation. Give the person time to process and respond. Use pauses to allow them to catch up. Additionally, try to simplify the conversation by discussing one topic at a time. If they seem overwhelmed, take a break and return to the conversation later.

Large gatherings can be difficult for someone living with dementia. Ensure there are quiet spaces to have one-on-one conversations, and actively involve your loved one by creating opportunities for conversations with small groups of people.



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Follow the 5 S's for effective communication

SLOW

SLOW down your rate of speech and wait for the person to respond (this can sometimes take a while).

SIMPLE

Keep what you say SIMPLE - one idea at a time, using short sentences.

SPECIFIC

Talk about SPECIFIC people, objects or events. Use names (John, Mary) instead of pronouns (he, she).

SHOW

Use gestures, point to items, use visual examples such as photographs, or show choices.

SMILE

Facial expressions can be understood long after verbal language is lost. Send a message with a smile.



Always remember, the person living with dementia is doing the best they can. Families and friends can support them to live well beyond their diagnosis through consistency, patience and understanding.



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