



dementia web

24 hour dementia helpline

0845 1204048

DAA Dementia
Action Alliance

Communication



dementia web
Information sheet

Communication

Communication difficulties which dementia may

- The person you are caring for may be trying to interpret a world that no longer makes sense to them because their brain is interpreting information incorrectly.
- Sometimes you and the person you care for will misinterpret each other's attempts at communication. These misunderstandings can be distressing for both parties.
- A person with dementia may repeat what they are saying, may be slow to find a word or have difficulty finding the correct word, particularly the names of objects, places, people.
- They may find it difficult to 'initiate' or start to do something, follow a conversation, follow a television programme, read a book or magazine.
- They may start to say something and then forget what he/she was talking about. The person may say things that are not true.
- Many of these problems worsen as the person's dementia develops.

How you can help

- Try to be "**person centred**" in your dealings by appreciating the person's difficulties; help by focusing on what a person can still do and encourage this.
- Acknowledge and clarify the person's feelings and what they are trying to communicate. This helps to 'validate' their experience.
- Try not to contradict or argue, just 'go with the flow'. It may sound like a tall order to do this but an argument will exhaust you both and there will be no winners. Winning an argument relies on remembering what has been said or agreed – and the person you care for may not be able to recall what has happened, but the bad feelings may linger and cause further upset and mistrust.

10 top tips

- Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking to them. A person who has dementia may take some time to 'tune in' to what is happening. Have they just woken up, do they need time to adjust?
- Speak clearly and calmly. Try to avoid speaking sharply or raising your voice as this can cause distress to a person who has dementia.
- Processing information will take the person longer than it used to – so allow time for a message to 'get through'. It can also help if you rephrase what you say using different words.
- Use simple, short sentences. A person who has memory loss is likely to remember the last thing that has been said.

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10 top tips cont...

- Make sure that the lighting is sufficient for the person to see you and, if wearing glasses, that they are clean.
- Make sure that unnecessary noise is reduced. A person who has dementia will have difficulty concentrating on too many things at once. Sounds like the TV, washing machine, vacuum cleaner etc can be very distracting.
- Avoid too many closed questions (questions which require a 'Yes' or 'No' answer) - you might always get "No"! Instead of asking 'Would you like a cup of tea?' which might be declined - even though you know the person is thirsty - try something like 'I'm just going to make a cuppa - do you fancy a biscuit with yours?'.
- If the person you care for doesn't understand what you are saying, try getting the message across in a different way by using photographs or objects.
- As the dementia progresses, the person may become less able to start a conversation, so start taking the initiative.
- In conversation, use familiar names and family phrases and jokes that the person has known for a long time. This can give a person a frame of reference for communication when everything else seems hard to grasp.

Dementia Information Service

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