

# **COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITH PATIENTS WHO HAVE DEMENTING ILLNESSES**

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**At all stages of the disease patients may have difficulties expressing or comprehending and responding to what you may say to them. In the early stage they may understand what you say but have trouble with finding the correct word to use to express themselves. In the middle stages the person may have trouble communicating in full sentences and may have problems understanding what is said to them, especially abstract ideas. In the late stages the person may neither understand what is being said nor be able to speak at all. In all the stages the person is able to respond to the emotional content of a message and interpret kindness and love as well as anger and hostility.**

**It is easy to become frustrated when communicating with a person with a dementing illness but not as frustrated as the person can become when they are having difficulty understanding you. Underlying all communication techniques is the need to reduce frustration in both the patient and yourself.**

- Reduce surrounding distractions such as noise, television, nearby conversations.**
- Start all interactions with good eye contact. If possible get down to the person's level rather than standing and looking down.**
- Identify yourself and call the person by their name.**
- Speak slowly.**
- Do not show anger verbally or with physical threats like pointing a finger.**
- Use short, simple sentences preferably using one noun and verb with each direction. They may have difficulty following longer conversations.**
- Avoid pronouns such as he, she, that or there. Be specific.**
- Wait until one direction/sentence is completed before going on to the next step/sentence.**

- **Be positive: let the person know what they can do rather than what they should not do.**
- **Try not to contradict or get into an argument with the person.**
- **Try not to reason logically with the person.**
- **Use repetition. Frequent reminders may reassure the person.**
- **Avoid asking questions that rely on memory like: Do you know who that is in the picture or Do you remember when we went to the restaurant last week?**
- **Try not to make demands, only requests.**
- **Allow adequate response time to requests to perform any activity.**
- **Limit choices to avoid confusion. This pertains to mealtime and dressing.**
- **Always speak in a soft, reassuring, accepting tone of voice. The feelings behind the tone will be conveyed to the person immediately.**
- **Provide challenging and enjoyable diversional activities that avoid frustration.**
- **Provide continuous reassurance that the person will be alright and you will always be there to help them. Fear of the unknown is what may motivate anxiety and result in catastrophic behavior problems.**

### **Coping Skills**

- **Never confront the person with their memory loss.**
- **Never talk about the person in front of them**
- **Never respond to the person's accusations.**
- **Never get into a power struggle with the person.**
- **Never put the person on the spot, contradict or argue with the person.**
- **Never assume the person is doing things just to be difficult. It is always the manifestations of the disease that is causing the problems.**

**By using the above techniques and skills you will be a happier caregiver and the patient will be less likely to have behavior problems.**