

COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA: HOW WE COMMUNICATE

When we think of communication, we usually think of language - and Alzheimer's disease has a profound effect on language. The following information is an excerpt from the *Alzheimer Society of Canada fact sheet on Communication*.

Alzheimer's disease affects speech and the use of words, as well as the understanding of the words heard. As the disease progresses, language as a means of communication, becomes less effective. Caregivers need to use different ways of getting the message across and staying in touch.

- ***Communicating with a person with Alzheimer's disease requires belief, creativity, understanding, patience, and skill.***
- ***Belief that every person, regardless of abilities, maintains a core of self that can be reached***
- ***Creativity in expressing both your feelings and your message***
- ***Understanding the effect of the disease on communication***
- ***Patience to slow down, listen, watch, wait for a response, repeat a phrase***
- ***Skill to convey messages or feelings effectively***

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Getting a message across

Set the stage

Communicating is always easier if other things are not happening at the same time. When trying to get your message across, make sure that there are few distractions. For example, if the TV or radio is distracting the person, turn it off.

Get the person's attention

Approach the person slowly and from the front. Gently touch a hand or arm to help get attention. Wait until he/she seems ready to listen before talking.

Make eye contact

Sit facing or standing in front of him/her, if possible. Keeping eye contact (if culturally appropriate) will help the person know who is speaking and may assist the person in concentrating on the message.

Speak slowly and clearly

Use simple words and short sentences to make the message clear. If the person has hearing problems, lowering the pitch of your voice is often better than increasing its volume.

Give one message at a time

Keep a conversation simple. Too many thoughts or ideas at one time can be confusing. Limit choices.

Pay attention

The person's reaction to what you say can give you some idea of how much is understood. Watch facial expressions and body movements. Respond to moods and emotions especially when the words don't make sense or are inappropriate.

Repeat important information

If you are uncertain that the message was understood the first time, repeat it using the same words.

Show and talk

Use actions as well as words. For example, if it is time to go for a walk, point to the door or bring the person's coat or sweater to illustrate what you mean.

Take time

Allow the person time to respond. Interrupting can discourage further communication.

The material in this handout has been adapted from:

Day to Day: Communication, Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2007.

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