



Dementia Communication Guide

Practical Ways to Connect Through Kindness, Patience, and Understanding

Why Communication Matters

Living with dementia can make it difficult for a person to find the right words, understand conversations, or remember recent events. While communication changes over time, meaningful connection is still possible.

A calm voice, a warm smile, familiar music, and patient listening can help reduce anxiety and create moments of joy.

Remember: You're not testing memory, you are building connection.

Understanding Communication Changes

People living with dementia may:

- Forget names or recent conversations
- Repeat the same questions
- Lose track of conversations
- Have difficulty finding words
- Misunderstand complex instructions
- Become overwhelmed in noisy environments

These changes are caused by the disease affecting areas of the brain responsible for language and memory—not by stubbornness or unwillingness to communicate.

DO'S ✓

Speak Slowly

Use a calm, gentle voice.

Use Short Sentences

Give one idea or instruction at a time.

Instead of:

"Let's get your shoes, grab your sweater, and then we'll go outside."

Try:

"Let's put on your shoes."

Maintain Eye Contact

Face the person before speaking.

Smile.

Allow them to focus on you.

Give Time to Respond

Wait patiently.

Avoid finishing every sentence for them.

Silence is okay.

Use Familiar Names

Instead of:

"Remember your neighbour Susan?"

Try:

"Susan is here to visit."

Validate Feelings

Instead of correcting facts, respond to emotions.

Example:

"I want to go home."

Rather than:

"You already are home."

Try:

"Tell me about your home."

Reduce Distractions

Turn off:

- Television
- Loud music
- Multiple conversations

A quiet environment improves understanding.

Use Gentle Touch (When Appropriate)

A hand on the shoulder or holding their hand can be reassuring if welcomed.

DON'TS X

Avoid saying:

✗ "Don't you remember?"

✗ "I already told you."

✗ "You're wrong."

✗ "No, that's not what happened."

✗ "You have to remember."

These statements can increase anxiety, embarrassment, or frustration.

Offer Simple Choices

Instead of many options:

Choose between two.

✓ Tea or coffee?

✓ Blue sweater or green sweater?

Smile More Than You Speak

Body language often communicates more than words.

Listen Beyond Words

Notice:

- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Body language
- Behaviour

Sometimes behaviour is communication.

Helpful Communication Tips

Use Yes/No Questions

Instead of:

"What would you like to eat?"

Ask:

"Would you like soup?"

Offer Simple Choices

Instead of many options:

Choose between two.

✓ Tea or coffee?

✓ Blue sweater or green sweater?

Smile More Than You Speak

Body language often communicates more than words.

Listen Beyond Words

Notice:

- Facial expressions
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Sometimes behaviour is communication.

When Someone Repeats Themselves

Rather than saying:

"You already asked me."

Try:

- ✓ Answer calmly.
- ✓ Redirect gently.
- ✓ Introduce another activity.
- ✓ Play a familiar song.

If Someone Becomes Upset

1. Stay calm.
2. Lower your voice.
3. Acknowledge feelings.
4. Avoid arguing.
5. Redirect attention.
6. Offer reassurance.

Example:

"I can see this is upsetting. I'm here with you."

The Power of Music

Music often reaches parts of the brain that remain active even when language and memory decline.

Benefits may include:

- 🎵 Reduced anxiety
- 🎵 Improved mood
- 🎵 Increased social interaction
- 🎵 Better emotional connection
- 🎵 Reduced agitation
- 🎵 Encouraging movement and singing

Even if words become difficult, music can still help people express themselves.

Quick Reference

DO

- ✓ Speak slowly
- ✓ Smile
- ✓ Maintain eye contact
- ✓ Use simple language
- ✓ Be patient
- ✓ Validate emotions
- ✓ Reduce distractions
- ✓ Use familiar music

DON'T

- ✗ Correct constantly
- ✗ Rush conversations
- ✗ Ask memory-test questions
- ✗ Argue
- ✗ Raise your voice
- ✗ Finish every sentence
- ✗ Give multiple instructions at once

Remember

People living with dementia may forget your words...

...but they often remember how you made them feel.

Every conversation is an opportunity to offer dignity, comfort, and connection.

Trusted Resources

Alzheimer's Association

<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/communications>

Practical communication tips for caregivers and families.

Alzheimer's Society (UK)

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/communicating>

Advice on communicating at different stages of dementia.

National Institute on Aging (NIA)

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-and-dementia/communicating-people-alzheimers-disease>

Evidence-based guidance for communicating with people living with Alzheimer's disease.

Dementia Australia

<https://www.dementia.org.au/information/communication>

Resources on verbal and non-verbal communication techniques.

Teepa Snow – Positive Approach to Care

<https://teepasnow.com>

Training resources and practical communication strategies for dementia care.