



Tips for Caregivers - Family Caregivers and Health Care Professionals

Communication – Remember, communication has verbal and non-verbal components. Non-verbal communication is very important for all of us, but it is especially important for persons with dementia.

- Minimize distracting sights and sounds, keep background noise to a minimum.
- Approach slowly and from the front; sometimes helps to verbally greet as you approach.
- Attempt to establish and maintain eye contact.
- Offer your hand or touch the shoulder if the person doesn't mind (be mindful of personal space) Obviously, when working with a close family member or friend, there is often more touching – hugs, kisses, etc.
- Try to get eye level with the person.
- Use the person's preferred name; tell person your name. If it is someone you know well, give verbal cues about your identity.
- Wait for the person to respond before starting to talk.
- Be positive, smile.
- Use a friendly tone of voice.
- Use a deep pitch.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Use short, simple sentences.
- Avoid arguing.
- Do not patronize or talk down to the person -
Avoid addressing the person as "sweetie," "dearie," etc., unless it is someone you have known long-term, and you customarily address them in this manner.
- To get a person to do something:
 - (1) Give choices – only two or three simple options.
 - (2) Try asking the person to help you.
 - (3) Ask person "to give it a try".
 - (4) Break down multi-step tasks to one step at a time.
 - (5) Demonstrate behavior you are trying to elicit; guide the person's movement
 - (6) Offer thanks and appreciation for efforts.
 - (7) Offer praise.
 - (8) If person starts showing frustration, switch to friendly conversation, back off, try again later
- For conversation/interaction:
 - (1) Keep it slow; give person lots of time to respond.
 - (2) Use familiar words or phrases.
 - (3) Acknowledge feelings and emotions.
 - (4) Know about the person - likes, dislikes, family members, values, etc.
 - (5) Stimulate and enhance conversation with familiar items, pictures, etc.
 - (6) Look interested-maintain eye contact, nod, etc.
 - (7) Understand and accept repetition.



- (8) Use humor, laugh together.
- (9) Be comfortable with long pauses, periods of quiet.

Managing problem behaviors – Remember that frequently problem behaviors arise from frustration and anger. Sometimes a person's inability to effectively communicate can lead to behavior problems.

Some problem behaviors result from environmental triggers, hallucinations and/or delusions, misunderstanding of someone or something, etc. At all times, it is important to keep yourself calm and remind yourself that the illness is the cause of the behavior and it is not personal.

- Use strategies for effective communication and possibly avoid some problem behaviors.
- Simple, familiar routines can also help avoid difficult behaviors.
- Address basic needs that the person may be having difficulty communicating to you. (Hungry, thirsty, cold, hot, feeling pain, needs to use bathroom, etc.)
- Listen for key words/observe non-verbal behavior to help determine needs.
- Keep tasks simple; break multi-step tasks down.
- Always be patient; give ample time to respond.
- Avoid arguing; avoid denying hallucinations. (Comment on the feeling behind what is being said – “I heard you talking to your mother. I miss my mother, too.”)
- Place visual cues in the environment to reduce confusion and frustration. (Notes to answer frequently-asked questions, drawings/pictures on door to remind person what is in the room – picture of toilet on bathroom door, etc., familiar photo or decoration on the person's bedroom door, etc.)
- Use sincere empathy.
- Notice environmental “triggers” that always, or almost always, result in fear, anger, problem behaviors. Avoid/eliminate the triggers.
- Be tolerant of behaviors you consider a problem. Ask yourself, “Does this behavior put someone at risk?” (For example, if someone is wandering in a safe environment and no one is at risk, it is not a real problem.)
- Similarly, if a problem behavior can be less of a problem simply by modifying the environment, do so.
- Some problem behaviors are not avoidable. Use calm, reassuring communication to reduce fear and anxiety in the person. Once you have the person's attention, use distraction. (Re-direct the conversation, move them to a different room, engage them in a familiar activity that they enjoy, etc.)
- If you are unable to calm the person, and anger and frustration are being directed towards you, step away. If another caregiver is available, a new face can make a difference. If not, be patient and try again later.

Final Note: Be sure to inform physician of delusions and/or hallucinations. Also inform physician of recurring problem behaviors, especially if they are harmful to self/others.