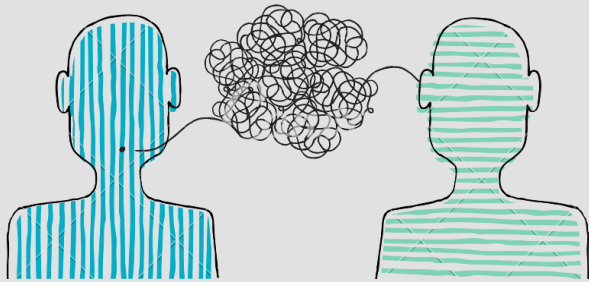


Communication Strategies



What is dementia?

Dementia is a progressive brain disease in which two or more of the following functions are significantly impaired:

- **Memory:** short-term or long-term
- **Cognition:** thinking, planning, reasoning, and language skills
- **Behavior:** changes to mood or personality
- **Physical function:** motor skills, balance and gait, and the senses

Keep in mind: You can't control memory loss, only your reaction to it. For a person with dementia, their disability is memory loss.

You wouldn't ask a blind person to see – don't ask someone with dementia to remember.

Common Challenges:

- Finding the right words and understanding their meaning
- Connecting what is seen with what is heard
- Paying attention
- Filtering out background noise
- Frustration when communication isn't working
- Repetition of statements or questions

Communication Techniques:

- **Forgive:** Move past negative reactions and accept blame (even when it isn't your fault). Don't take things personally, question their memory, or blame them.
- **Slow down:** Adjust your expectations, and be willing to try again later. Stay cheerful and reassuring. Don't rush.
- **Keep it simple:** Provide brief explanations, repeat instructions or sentences in exactly the same way, and present the person with easy, straightforward options. Try to avoid open-ended questions, and don't remind someone they forgot or try to test their memory.
- **Go with the flow:** Agree, acknowledge the person's feelings, and divert or redirect their attention. Don't reason, argue, or try to convince.

Understanding *Anosognosia*:

Anosognosia is a deficit of self-awareness, a condition in which a person who suffers some disability seems unaware of the existence of their disability. Many people living with dementia are not aware of their own memory loss or changing abilities. **It's not helpful to try to convince someone that they forgot.**

Alzheimer's Caregiving Tips

Communication Strategies

Real-World Examples

"What doctor's appointment? There's nothing wrong with me."

Focus on short explanations & accepting blame: "It's just a regular check up. I'm sorry I forgot to tell you."

Avoid reasoning: "You've been seeing this doctor every three months for the last two years. It's written on the calendar and I told you about it yesterday and this morning."

"I didn't write this check for \$500. Someone at the bank is forging my signature."

Focus on responding to feelings, reassuring & redirecting: "That's a scary thought. I'll make sure they don't do that. Would you help me fold the towels?"

Avoid arguing: "What? Don't be silly! The bank wouldn't be forging your signature."

"Nobody's going to make decisions for me. You can go now...and don't come back!"

Focus on accepting blame, responding to feelings, reassuring & distracting: "I'm sorry this is a tough time. I love you and we're going to get through this together. You know what? Don has a new job. He's really excited about it."

Avoid confronting: "I'm not going anywhere and you can't remember enough to make your own decisions."

"Who are you? Where is my husband?"

Focus on going with the flow & reassuring: "He'll be here for dinner. How about some milk and cookies?"

Avoid taking it personally: "What do you mean 'where's your husband?' I'm right here!"

"I don't want to eat this! I hate chicken!"

Focus on accepting blame & responding positively: "I'm so sorry, I forgot. I was in such a rush that it slipped my mind. Let me see what else we have available." Leave the room and try again.

Avoid responding negatively: "You told me you wanted chicken. I'm not making anything else, so you better eat it!"

"I'm going to the store for a newspaper."

Focus on repeating in the exact same way: "Please put your shoes on...please put your shoes on."

Avoid repeating differently: "Please put your shoes on...you need to put on your shoes."

Connect Using the 5 Senses

- **Sight:** Pictures can activate old memories, or provide comfort and enjoyment for someone missing a loved one.
- **Sound:** Music is a powerful way to connect with someone with memory loss.
- **Touch:** A gentle touch on the shoulder allows a person with memory loss to know you are speaking with them, and can foster a sense of connection.
- **Smell:** Certain scents can be comforting, especially if they are tied to fond memories. Think flowers, a relaxing fragrance, or a fresh batch of cookies.
- **Taste:** A person's favorite treat can be a great distraction on a tough day.