

AGING I&R/A TIPS

National Aging Information & Referral Support Center

COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALZHEIMER'S OR DEMENTIA

“The greatest attributes anyone can have are
(1) a positive attitude & (2) a sense of humor”
—Jonathan Franzen (“My Father’s Brain”)

Many people in the early to middle stages of Alzheimer’s want to, and should be involved in making the decisions that affect their life.

Communicating with someone who has Alzheimer’s or other dementia requires sensitivity, respect, and understanding.

Effective Communication Techniques

- Identify yourself and call the person by name.
- Be a good listener. Give individuals time to talk about and describe what they want or need. Let them know you are listening and trying to understand.
- Limit distracting background noises, such as other conversations.
- If needed, assist the person with orientation to time and place.
- Use nouns. Try to avoid using pronouns.
- Identify people, places, and things by name.
- Speak slowly and distinctly. A lower pitch is more calming.
- Carefully choose simple, short, adult-level words. Avoid using slang, jargon, and acronyms.

- If the conversation stops making logical sense, do not correct the person.
- Listen carefully and try to find meaning in what is being said.
- Use concrete statements. For example: “Your wife Millie will pick you up at North Shore Center at 3:00 p.m. today, rather than, “She will be there in a little while.”
- Ask one question at a time. Allow the individual time to process what was said.
- Don’t try to finish the person’s sentences.
- Use repetition. Repeat what was said if clarification is needed.

SOURCE: Adapted from General Guidelines for Enhancing Communication, Alzheimer’s Association, New York City Chapter.

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