

# Communicating with Individuals with Alzheimer's Disease

Knowing how to communicate with people with Alzheimer's may prevent behaviors and help maximize their quality of life. If you are caring for someone with Alzheimer's, you need to adapt what you say and how you say in a way they can best understand. It is important to be aware of how cognitive losses affect communication. Alzheimer's causes a decline in cognitive function, including memory, thinking, learning, language, word finding, reasoning and logical thinking. Your loved one may have trouble coming up with the right words and won't always be able to follow a conversation, which can be frustrating and frightening for them.

Your goal is to make the communication process as easy as you can and not to frustrate them or remind them of their memory loss and deficits. Fill in the word if they get stuck. Use short, simple sentences and speak slowly to give your loved one time to process what you are saying. Remind them where they are and make them feel calm in their surroundings. If someone comes to visit, tell your loved one the name and relationship of the visitor, even if they just saw them. Never assume they remember and don't ask them "do you know who this is?" This will upset your loved one as well as their company.

Do not argue or reason with a person with Alzheimer's disease. They do not have the ability to use logic and reasoning and it will only cause them to get upset or agitated. If they say things that don't make sense, get their facts wrong, or use the wrong word, constantly correcting them may also make them angry or

agitated. Because of their short term memory loss, your loved one may not remember you telling them something and insist you never did. Do not try to jog their memory, convince them what you said or argue that you already told them. Although it can be difficult at times to let things go, you need to realize it is because of the disease. Keeping them calm will help prevent behaviors.

As the disease progresses, your loved one may no longer initiate conversation or understand as much, making it difficult to know what to talk about. Try to keep topics simple, and present one idea at a time. Find easy topics from their past that they still enjoy and remember. You will need to do more of the talking. Make a memory book of old family pictures. If your loved one gets upset because he or she no longer recognizes the pictures, then try using pictures from magazines.

Be careful not to ask too many questions as this can be frustrating. Avoid asking open ended questions, such as "what do you want to do today" or "what would you like for lunch"? Instead, ask multiple choice questions such as "would you like to go for a walk or go to the park" or would you like oatmeal or eggs"? If they can no longer make a choice, try asking yes or no questions.

Keep in mind that not all communication is verbal. Individuals with Alzheimer's disease may not always understand what you say, but they do pick up clues from your nonverbal communication.

Be conscious of how you talk and the subtle messages your body language sends. Standing over someone can be very threatening. Sit down next to the person so you are on the same level before you start talking. Be aware of your tone of voice; does it sound happy, sad, angry, or impatient? Use positive gestures (a friendly wave, a smile, blowing a kiss) and avoid negative ones (shrugging your shoulders,

pointing your finger, scowling, pursing your lips).

If communicating becomes too difficult, try listening to music, or going to a park or beach and enjoy the view. Sometimes just holding your loved ones hand, a gentle touch on the arm and a reassuring hug is all the communication you need.