

COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA

A person with dementia may have problems with:

- Finding the right word or losing her/his train of thought
- Understanding what words mean
- Paying attention
- Remembering sequence of how to do things, like getting dressed
- Blocking out background noises
- Frustration with trying to communicate
- Being sensitive to tone and loudness of voices

How to help:

- Make eye contact and call the person by name
- Be aware of your tone, the loudness of your voice, how you look at the person and your body language
- Encourage a two-way conversation for as long as possible
- Use gentle touch
- Try distraction if communication is difficult

To encourage communication:

- Show a warm, loving manner
- Hold the person's hand
- Be concerned about the person's concerns, even if they are hard to understand
- Let the person make some decisions and stay involved
- Be patient if the person becomes angry

To speak effectively:

- Offer simple, step-by-step directions
- Repeat instructions, allow time for response. Don't interrupt
- Don't talk about the person as if he/she isn't there
- Don't use "baby talk"
- Be direct, specific, and positive. "Let's try this" instead of pointing out mistakes; "Please do this" instead of "Don't do this"; "Thanks for helping" even if results aren't perfect
- Ask yes/no questions: "Are you tired" instead of "How do you feel?"
- Limit the number of choices: "Do you want _____ or _____?" instead of "What do you want for dinner?"
- Try different words if he/she doesn't understand

- Try not to say “Don’t you remember?” or “I already told you that.”
- **If you become frustrated, take a time out for yourself.**