

5 communication tips

for conversations with people living with dementia

When a person living with dementia is having trouble expressing themselves or understanding what is being communicated, try these tips to help you stay connected:



1.
Use what you know about the person



2.
Reduce distractions



3.
Chat face to face



4.
Be flexible



5.
Stay positive

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1. Use what you know about the person

- › What does the person like? Use that knowledge to suggest conversation topics or activities they may enjoy.
 - › Nurture the person's skills and abilities. Focus on what they can do instead of what they can't.
 - › When the person is making a choice, offer them a couple of options that you know they will like.
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2. Reduce distractions

- › Take note of possible visual or auditory distractions in the person's environment and minimize them.
 - › Account for any hearing or vision challenges the person may have.
 - › Make eye contact to help focus the person's attention.
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3. Chat face to face

- › Avoid talking to the person if you're behind them or where they can't see you.
 - › Speak clearly, using short and simple sentences.
 - › Show as well as talk. Using actions can help give your words meaning.
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4. Be flexible

- › A person's abilities can change from day to day, so take a few moments at the beginning of the conversation to assess how they're doing.
 - › Look for changes in behaviour and body language that may tell how the person is feeling, especially if they may indicate discomfort. Adjust to accommodate.
 - › When the person is unable to communicate verbally, communicate through the senses, like touch.
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5. Stay positive

- › Be aware of your own tone and body language. Model the mood.
 - › Connect instead of correct. Ignore mistakes and give encouragement.
 - › When you feel overwhelmed, take a step back and exhale.
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Take care of yourself too!

On the days when these tips don't seem to help, remember that your presence is still felt by the person living with dementia. It's not easy to be there for the person while also taking care of yourself at the same time. It's important to find a healthy balance and ask for a hand when you need it!

For more information and support, contact your local Alzheimer Society at alzheimer.ca/Find. We are here to help.

