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## A Guideline for Family Carers.

### Communication in every situation

It is important to remember that *every person has a different experience* in dementia and experiences *different symptoms* that may disable their ability to communicate.

Some people with dementia can recall words but not recognise certain people, places or items. Some people with dementia cannot recall memories but can recognise items people and places. Some people with dementia lose the ability to recall and recognise objects' and people and places so the approach must be personal to support communication here are some useful tips:

- Your tone of voice forms a significant part of the meaning of any communication. Even if the words are not understood a gentle, non-threatening tone may achieve the desired result.
- Agree never argue
- Redirect never try and reason or correct
- Reassure never recorrect
- Say “do what you can never say you cannot”.
- Your feelings will be conveyed to a consumer through your voice and body language and that if you care about them then this will be recognised.
- A consumer with dementia may not contribute to a conversation as expected, however, this does not mean they do not appreciate and enjoy the interaction.
- A person with dementia may be able to read but unable to speak
- People with dementia often retain the memory or the words of songs of their past.
- A consumer with dementia may be able to follow instructions but these need to be straight forward and given one step at a time.
- Having dementia does not mean a consumer can no longer communicate. People with dementia can still use words and actions to let you know what they are feeling, however it may require greater effort on our part to understand what they are trying to convey.



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- Humour is often an important part of social interaction for many people with dementia and can make people feel at ease and less frustrated with their inability to express themselves.

### Specific communication approaches

There are specific approaches that we can use in situations to better communicate with people with dementia.

The approaches most used are [validation](#) , [reality orientation](#) , [reminiscence](#) and [redirection](#).

*1. Validation of happy or sad feelings.* Validation techniques acknowledge the reality a consumer with dementia is experiencing, especially the feelings and emotions associated with their reality, and work within it to better communicate and achieve positive outcomes. The term validation therapy is attributed to social worker **Naomi Feils** who recognised that reality orientation had limited value for people with more advanced dementia. Validation therapy can strengthen *relationship centred care* by building trust , an improved sense of meaning and a level of cooperation for the consumer.

**Examples** -The consumer may believe they are still a young parent (living in 1958) , they appear concerned about the welfare of their child. Underlying their concern could be feelings of anxiety and worry. Responding to the *feelings* being expressed rather than the *words* is the key to this technique. A strategy you can use

- *Tell me about your children*
- *My children are at school too I know they are safe , lets go and make some afternoon tea for them .*

Although reasoning and memory is impaired, the emotional responses of people with dementia continue. Exploring these emotional responses can allow the consumer to release the build-up of anxiety and stress that might otherwise further cloud their thoughts.

- When a person asks to go home validate them by saying *I want to go home too , walk with them and build trust by redirecting them to **reminiscence**.*



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2. *Reminiscence*. This technique involves using a consumers memories and recollections to create a rapport and better communication. The tool called “**About Me**” provides the likes , dislikes and preferences of a consumer and a snapshot summary of their life story , where they were born, their occupation, their spiritual and cultural values and preferences. **Be cautious** sometimes memories will be associated with bad experiences, it is important to be aware of this and steer conversation away if possible.

Repetition of stories is common, and we should be prepared for this. The positive feelings associated with telling their story are what is important, not the story itself. If you feel anxious or upset walk away , reapproach later. Contact a staff member for support.

### Life Story for reminiscing

Reminiscence using life story can be a highly effective way of communicating with a consumer with dementia, a collection of a consumers past experiences, on which they are the expert and can share their knowledge and significant events and achievements. A life story can be produced in many formats, including visual and auditory albums, books, DVD's and digital technology.

### Communication within the environment: ‘Sensory Communication’

Our sensory perceptions of smell, taste, touch, hearing, sight, movement and pain are our first point of receiving information. It tells us how we fit into the world around us, and where our body is in space. For some people with dementia, these sensory perceptions may be affected or damaged and therefore a consumer may have an altered perception of their environment. It becomes our role to modify the environment to make this communication easier and more meaningful for the consumer with dementia.

## Useful Tips for Carers

1. **Please engage with me first** - not with my carer, family member or friend.  
Do not assume that I do not understand.



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### **2. Please Speak Clearly to Me**

Face me. Do not approach me from the side. Speak clearly. Use short sentences with one idea at a time and avoid jargon.

### **3. Please Keep Questions Simple**

It is easier for me to answer direct questions, rather than open-ended questions. So instead of asking, “What did you enjoy about the park today?” ask me “Wasn’t it lovely when we went to the park today?”

### **4. Treat Me with Respect and Dignity**

I am still here. I am still a person so do not patronise me. I act differently because I am having difficulty communicating with you. Help me to feel understood and maintain my identity.

### **5. Distractions Cause Disruptions**

Keep the environment calm. The less the noise when you are talking to me the easier it is for me to understand what you are saying.

### **6. Be Patient and Kind**

Sometimes it takes longer for me to process what you are saying so please do not rush me.

### **7. Break It Down**

Providing information in smaller chunks will really help me.

### **8. Signage helps**

I may be able to recognise more things with a sign or a symbol.



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### References

<http://myalzheimersstory.com/2017/05/28/10-pieces-of-wisdom-from-dr-allen-power-dementia-beyond-disease/>