



Communicating well with a person with a dementia:

Verbal Communication

Generally speaking, as a dementia progresses, a person's ability to understand verbal communication, their thinking speeds, word finding, reading and writing can all be affected. However, many abilities may remain, such as the willingness to communicate, knowing there is turn taking in a conversation, the importance of making contact by eye or touch, recognising humour, knowing what a question sounds like and that an answer is needed.

This information sheet explains how we can encourage communication abilities and where more information for carers and friends can be found. This particular sheet focuses on spoken communication. Where the person is using non-verbal communication (body language, behaviour) please refer to Communicating Well with a person with a dementia: non-verbal communication.

Top Tips vs Knowing the Person

Top Tips

There are some basic principles that help everyone communicate better, such as:

- Minimise distractions (e.g. turn the TV off or Hoover off; ensure the person knows you are listening or speaking; check hearing aid is working).
- Be relaxed so that you really are listening, your speech is at a pace the person can understand, and your tone is calm.
- Tune in to how the person may be feeling. Are they worried? Being humorous? Angry?
- Tune in to where their thinking is. Are they talking about something current or about something in their past? Match your topic, tone and facial expressions to suit.
- Does the person have short term memory loss? You may need to simplify and shorten your conversation. You will need to be patient as this may feel to the person like the first time they have asked or told you this (even if you have heard it many times) or they may be struggling to find the right words.

Helpful Websites:

You Tube: Communicating with people living with Dementia Graham Stokes.

Dementia UK: <https://www.dementiauk.org/get-support/understanding-changes-in-behaviour/tips-for-better-communication/>

Alzheimer's Society: <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-09/500lp-communicating-190521.pdf>

No internet?

Phone the Alzheimer's Society 0330 333 0804 and ask for factsheet 500 Communicating or ask for a support worker to phone or visit you.

Phone Dementia UK 0800 888 6678 and ask for Tips for Better Communication.

www.devoncarers.org.uk | 03456 434 435

Devon Carers can be reached on a single point of access telephone helpline for carers 03456 434 435. Calls to 0345 cost no more than calls to geographic numbers (01 or 02) and must be included in inclusive minutes and discount schemes in the same way by your service provider. Devon Carers is a project of Carers+, a consortium of Action East Devon, Colab Exeter and Westbank, the lead agency. Westbank Community Health and Care, Farm House Rise, Exminster, EX6 8AT Reg. Charity 1119541. Company No. 6243811.



Knowing the person.

Different dementias will impact in a different way on each person. People may have varying degrees of awareness of their abilities. This variety makes it vital that we match our communication to the individual.

Some of the person's abilities and interests will have changed, but some will remain. You know the person best and will know the topics of conversation that remain of interest. By observing what holds the person's attention and when they become impatient or angry you will learn the what helps with their communication.

You may feel that you are being patronising by simplifying your communication. Think back to when you learnt something new (a new language, to drive, using a computer or a new phone). What kind of communication helped you the most? Probably communication that went at your pace for your level of understanding. Maybe you needed it repeated and to be shown rather than just given verbal instruction. Patience and understanding probably helped you persevere. Huffing, puffing and pointing out your lack of skill would make you give up!

You are not being patronising – you are being caring and respectful in adjusting your communication to enable the person with the dementia to understand and join you.

Helpful websites:

Communicating with people with **Frontotemporal lobe dementia**:

http://www.cerebralfunctionunit.co.uk/kindell_talk.html

Lewy Bodies Dementia:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/dementia-care/0/steps/18880>

https://www.lbda.org/node/203#Communicating_Effectively

The **Rare Dementia Support Group** supports familial Alzheimer's Disease (FAD), Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD), Familial Frontotemporal Dementia (fFTD), Posterior Cortical Atrophy (PCA), Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA). <http://www.raredementiasupport.org/>

No Internet?

Ring the Lewy Bodies Society: 01942 914000

Ring the Rare Dementia Support Group

FAD Ivanna Pavisic: 07388 220 323 ivanna.pavisic.15@ucl.ac.uk

FTD Nikki Zimmermann: 07341 776 317 contact@raredementiasupport.org

fFTD Katrina Moore: 07592 540 555 katrina.moore@ucl.ac.uk

PCA Emma Harding: 07388 220 324 emma.harding@ucl.ac.uk

PPA Nikki Zimmermann: 07388 220 355 nikki.zimmermann@ucl.ac.uk