



COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

- ✓ **Reduce distractions:** Communicating is always easier if other things are not happening at the same time. For example, if the TV or radio is distracting the person, turn it off.
- ✓ **Gain attention:** Face the person. Making eye contact with the person will help focus their attention. Get close enough so they can see your facial expressions and any gestures you may use. As some people have problems recognizing family and friends, you might want to introduce yourself and remind them who you are.
- ✓ **Be aware of your tone and body language:** Remain calm and still and speak in a relaxed tone of voice to put them at ease. Brusque or hurried movement as well as a sharp tone or raised voice may cause distress.
- ✓ **Be clear and concise:** Talk slowly and clearly, using short and simple sentences. Use closed-ended questions which are focused and answered using a simple "yes" or "no" instead of open-ended questions, which are time-consuming, may result in unnecessary information, and may require more effort on the part of the person with dementia. Avoid phrases that can be interpreted literally, such as "it's the cat's pyjamas" or "up to my eyeballs" which might be confusing.
- ✓ **Be respectful:** Use the person's name when addressing them to help them retain a sense of identity. Do not patronise or speak down to the person. Avoid using childish or "elder" talk or any demeaning language. Avoid talking about the person as if they aren't present. Do not talk over the person. They may still understand what is being said even though they have lost the ability to form the words that are in their mind.
- ✓ **Listen carefully:** Listen carefully to what the person is saying and observe both verbal and non-verbal communications. Try not to interrupt the person even if you think you know what they are saying. If the person is having difficulty finding the right words, you can offer a guess as long as they appear to want some help.
- ✓ **Be patient:** The person may need more time to process the information so be patient. Provide reassurance. If they are having trouble communicating, tell them that it's fine and encourage them to keep trying to put their thoughts into words. If they sense you are impatient or agitated, they may feel stressed or frustrated.
- ✓ **Encourage exchange:** Make your communication a two-way process that engages the person with dementia. Involve them in the conversation. If you don't understand what is said, avoid making assumptions. Check back with them to see if you have understood what they mean.
- ✓ **Show and talk:** Use actions as well as words. For example, if it is time to go for a walk, point to the door or bring the person's coat or sweater to illustrate what you mean. Use body movements such as pointing or demonstrating an action to help the person understand what you are saying. Of course, this should be done tactfully so the person does not feel you are treating them as a child.
- ✓ **Encourage humour and laughter, respect sadness:** Humour can bring you closer, can release tension, and is good therapy. Laughing together over mistakes or misunderstandings can help. If the person seems sad, encourage them to express their feelings, and show you understand.
- ✓ **Don't forget to account for hearing or vision problems!** Make sure that the person is wearing a working hearing aid and/or clean glasses, if prescribed. Schedule regular checkups and listen for cues to health problems.