

Communicating with someone who has memory loss can be challenging.

A family member or friend with dementia may have difficulty understanding you, and you may have a hard time understanding what he or she is trying to communicate. There's potential for misunderstanding, confusion or frustration in both directions — making communication even more difficult.

## What to expect

A person with dementia may have difficulty remembering words or communicating clearly. You might notice patterns in conversations, including:

- Having trouble with finding the right word
- Substituting words
- Describing an object rather than naming it
- Repeating words, stories or questions
- Mixing unrelated ideas or phrases together
- Losing a train of thought
- Speaking less often
- Reverting to a first language

## 5 Things to Avoid

- Don't tell them they are wrong about something.
- Don't argue with them.
- Don't ask if they remember something.
- Don't remind them that their spouse, parent or other loved one is dead.
- Don't bring up topics that may upset them.

## Techniques for Approaching Someone Living with Dementia

- Approach from the front, never from behind.
- Approach very slowly to give their brain time to process.
- Avoid a confrontational stance.
- Crouch down to eye level or below, don't bend forward.
- Offer your hand, don't grab or pull.

## What you can do to help

To improve understanding in both directions:

- **Be patient.** Take time to listen and allow time for the person with dementia to talk without interruption.
- **Learn to interpret.** Try to understand what is being said based on the context. If the person is struggling to get an idea out, offer a guess.
- **Be connected.** Make eye contact while communicating and call the person by name. Hold hands while talking.
- **Be aware** of your nonverbal cues. Speak calmly. Keep your body language relaxed.
- **Offer comfort.** If a person with dementia is having trouble communicating, let him or her know it's OK and provide gentle encouragement.
- **Show respect.** Avoid baby talk and diminutive phrases, such as "good girl." Don't talk about the person as if he or she weren't there.
- **Avoid distractions.** Limit visual distractions and background noise, such as a TV or radio, that can make it difficult to hear, listen attentively or concentrate.
- **Keep it simple.** Use short sentences. As the disease progresses, ask questions that require a yes or no answer. Break down requests into single steps.
- **Offer choices.** Offer choices when making a request for something a person might resist. For example, if someone is reluctant to shower, you might say, "Would you like to take a shower before dinner or after dinner?"
- **Use visual cues.** Sometimes gestures or other visual cues promote better understanding than words alone. Rather than asking if the person needs to use the toilet, for example, take him or her to the toilet and point to it.
- **Avoid criticizing, correcting and arguing.** Don't correct mistakes. Avoid arguing when the person says something you disagree with.
- **Take breaks.** If you're frustrated, take a timeout.

Educational Materials from [UsAgainstAlzheimer's](#), [Mayo Clinic](#), and [DailyCaring](#)