

COMMUNICATION AND DEMENTIA

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Understanding Communication Problems

Communication problems with dementia are caused by damaged nerve cells and the decrease in neurotransmitter activity.

Symptoms

- ◇ Trouble with naming, word-finding, fluency, comprehension and repetition. In some cases, difficulties with reading and writing.
- ◇ Body language may be impaired.
- ◇ Don't assume the person's communication tools have the same meaning as before.
- ◇ May only be able to use a limited number of words.
- ◇ The person with dementia may be dealing with one or more of the following:

Confusion
Fear
Depression
Inability to learn new things
Loss of self-esteem

Anxiety
Irritability
Short attention span
Loss of inhibition

Your Response

The caregiver's response needs to be:

Calm
Accepting
Kind, patient and respectful
Listening more than talking

Reassuring
Connecting, not correcting
Flexible

General Techniques

- ◇ Approach from the front.
- ◇ Proceed slowly.
- ◇ Maintain a routine and structure.
- ◇ Have realistic expectations.
- ◇ Be involved in their daily tasks.
- ◇ Break down tasks into simple steps.



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Remember:

- ◇ Disorientation may be greater at specific times of the day.
- ◇ The patient needs a quiet, non-distracting environment.
- ◇ When you think you understand what's being communicated, try to help finish the sentence or complete the task.
- ◇ Be alert to signs that you have misunderstood the message and try again.
- ◇ Try to find a word you recognize and then repeat that word with inflection while mirroring the person's facial expression.
- ◇ If you cannot understand their verbal input, respond to their feelings or emotions.
- ◇ Patients may revert to original language in the later stages. Try to learn some simple adaptive words and phrases to help during this time.
- ◇ Every behavior has a reason.
- ◇ The patient is doing the best they can at the moment.
- ◇ Don't overreact.
- ◇ Don't embarrass, scold, shame, moralize or punish.
- ◇ Correct, if possible, any hearing or vision deficit.

