



PRIVATE DUTY
HOME CARE

CAREGIVER SUPPORT TOOL

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING DEMENTIA

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a group of symptoms caused by disorders in the brain that make it harder to remember, learn, and communicate. Dementia is caused by a destruction of brain cells resulting in a loss of functioning neurons (nerve cells) in areas of the brain dealing with cognitive functioning and memory. Common causes of dementia are:

- Huntingdon's Disease
- Parkinson's Disease
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Tumors
- Head injury
- Stroke

The sign that everyone associates with dementia is the loss of memory. Other signs include:

Difficulty with familiar tasks

- Problems with language
- Disorientation to time and place
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Misplacing things or wandering
- Personality changes
- Loss of initiative or interest in daily

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General Communication Tips

- **Don't react to behavior negatively or take it personally.** Focus your response on the behavior; avoid blaming it on their personality or condemning them as a "bad" person.
- **Provide a structured environment with as little change as possible to their daily routines.** Limit distractions and noise.
- **Avoid confrontation.** Instead, use distraction as a way to de-escalate a situation. Try to identify and prevent future causes of difficult behavior.
- **Ask one question at a time; yes or no answers work best.** Don't ask open-ended questions or give too many options. Be patient when listening to responses. It is okay to suggest words if the person is struggling.
- **Break down tasks into simple steps.** A task is more manageable for if cut down into simple steps.

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Tips for When Dealing with Specific Behaviors

- **Wandering:** Allow time for activity/exercise during the day. Put items such as purse, coat, keys, etc. out of sight so that they do not become “compelled” to go. Distract the person or redirect them to do something that they liked to do in the past.
- **Incontinence:** Establish a routine for toileting every two hours in order to avoid an emergency. The person may even forget where the bathroom is located or how to remove their clothing. Avoid coffee, tea, or soda that has caffeine and may act as a diuretic and bladder irritant.
- **Agitation:** Look for patterns to the angry behavior such as noise, people, frustration, fatigue, etc. If you notice a pattern, try to avoid the trigger that lead up to an angry outburst. Keep daily routines simple and similar and maintain a familiar environment. Re-direct/distract the person by asking them to do something that they enjoy. Never quickly approach someone who is agitated since they could strike out at you.
- **Paranoia:** The person may become suspicious, jealous or accusatory, even if there is no basis for the feelings. If something is lost or stolen, help the person look for it. Then distract them with other activities.
- **Lack of Appetite:** People with dementia can forget that they need to eat and drink. Keep encouraging food, drinks and snacks. Provide conversation to make meal time more enjoyable.