Communicating with a person with dementia

When a person gets dementia, their ability to communicate will be affected at some stage. They may:

- struggle to find the right word
- repeat things out loud
- not understand what others are saying
- get confused about words and what they mean
- begin speaking in their first language.

This can be frustrating for both of you, and you may find it hard to stay calm. Don't be too hard on yourself if this happens, and take a break when you need to.

Tips for communicating clearly and calmly

- Get the person's full attention before you start. The room should be quiet – for example, turn off the TV or radio.
- Make sure you are where you can see and hear each other as clearly as possible.
- Keep hearing aids and glasses clean. Keep prescriptions up to date.
- Listen carefully. Repeat what is said if the person does not understand.
- Go at a slightly slower pace than usual if the person can't follow you. Use short, simple sentences.
- Don't talk to the person as you would to a child – be patient and have respect for them. Do not speak to others as though the person is not there.
- Try to make sure your body language is open and relaxed.
- Try to avoid speaking sharply or raising your voice. If you become frustrated, leave the room until you feel calmer.
- Sometimes there is a language barrier. An interpreter or translation app on a smartphone or tablet can help.
- Allow the person plenty of time to respond – it may take them longer to work out their response.
- Try not to interrupt the person – even to help them find a word – as it can break the pattern of communication.
- If you and the person feel comfortable, physical contact can help show the person you care. Holding the person's hand or putting your arm around them can be very reassuring, if it feels appropriate.

Factsheet 500 **Communicating with a person with dementia** has more information. To read it, go to **alzheimers.org.uk/communicating**

We are here for you. If you are worried about dementia, call us on **0333 150 3456**. We can arrange to speak with you in any language.

Join our online community of people affected by dementia – go to **forum.alzheimers.org.uk**

To find support in your area, go to **alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory**

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