

THE IMPACT OF DEMENTIA ON COMMUNICATIONS

Dementia is a broad term for a group of cognitive disorders that are characterized by memory impairment, as well as difficulty in language, motor activity, and the ability to plan, organize and recognize objects. Dementia hinders communication as a result of the brain cell death limiting the brain's ability to control the rest of the body.

Before discussing how to communicate with individuals with dementia, it is important to first understand the types of communication (Merriam Webster, 2015).

Types of Communication

- ♦ Verbal Communication
 - Spoken words
- ♦ Nonverbal Communication
 - Eye contact
 - Body language
 - Tone of voice
 - Facial expressions
- ♦ Written Communication
 - Pen and paper
 - Pamphlets
 - Diagrams
 - Pictures

Tips to help effectively communicate with individuals who have dementia (ASHA, 2015):

- ♦ Be patient. Giving the individual a minute to think about what you said and how to answer might be necessary.
- ♦ Go somewhere quiet with minimal distractions, turning off music or TVs.
 - ♦ Speak slowly and clearly.
 - ♦ Start the conversation with something light or familiar.
 - ♦ Allow the other person to know when you are changing subjects by pausing or prompting them on the new topic.
 - ♦ If the individual is having trouble following the conversation, remind them what you were talking about.
 - ♦ Be aware of your body language. Studies have found that sitting face to face with someone and keeping eye contact is one the best ways to effectively communicate.
 - ♦ If someone does not understand what you are saying and you have repeated it several times, try to describe it in a different way.
 - ♦ Keep your voice at a normal volume; do not shout or yell.
 - ♦ Do not interrupt; allow the other person to speak and listen carefully.
 - ♦ When giving instructions, ask the individual to repeat things back to you, as well as requesting them to summarize what they



were told. If they are unable to repeat it back, take another approach, such as writing out directions or demonstrating it for them.

- ♦ If the individual is unable to follow the conversation or is having trouble participating, try a different form of communicating, like thumbs up or down, or showing them pictures of what you are asking.
- ♦ If you or the other individual is becoming frustrated because they cannot express themselves, take a deep breath, giving both of you a moment in silence to help refocus.

- ♦ Most importantly, always be respectful, address the individual even if they cannot express themselves, and do not converse as if they are not there.

Disclaimer:

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