
How to Use Non-Verbal Communication to Create More Positive Interactions with Your Loved One Living with Dementia



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Thank you! We would like to take a moment to thank you for downloading this free guide on how to effectively communicate with your loved with dementia. I truly hope that you find it as a helpful resource.

First, let me explain the purpose of this guide and what you will find inside...

Caring for a loved one with dementia, whether as a family member, friend, or trained professional can be extremely challenging. Although we are not born knowing how to communicate with a person with dementia, we can most certainly learn which can help strengthen the quality of the relationship and the overall caregiving experience.

In this guide you will find a brief overview of what dementia is and some of the most common kinds of dementia and the effects on the body. You will learn some helpful tips about the various methods for communicating with someone who has dementia and how to use ***non-verbal communication, i.e. using all of the five senses (see, hear, touch, taste, and smell).***

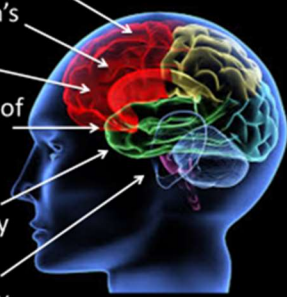
You will learn about “triggers” and how to identify them and tips to try to avoid creating conflict or increasing agitation.

Lastly, we will review how to create a positive care culture which will be significantly important in your communication efforts.

What is dementia?

Dementia is not a specific disease, but rather a cluster of symptoms caused by diseases or medical conditions that effect the brain. It can cause loss of cognitive functioning, e.g. the ability to think clearly, reason, remember certain events or people. The brain begins to lose function and will shut down over time. It can range in severity from mild to most severe and becomes more common as we grow older. In fact, it is estimated that about one-third of all people 85 years and older may have some form of dementia. There are many causes of dementia and symptoms may vary.

What are the most common symptoms of dementia?

Disease/Condition = Dementia Symptoms	
Disease/Condition	Dementia Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alzheimer's• Parkinson's• Stroke• Infection of Brain• Thyroid Deficiency• Vitamin Deficiency 	<p><i>Progressive decline in:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remembering• Paying attention• Speaking and understanding language• Problem solving• Orienting to day, year, season• Orienting to where they are• Orienting to who they are

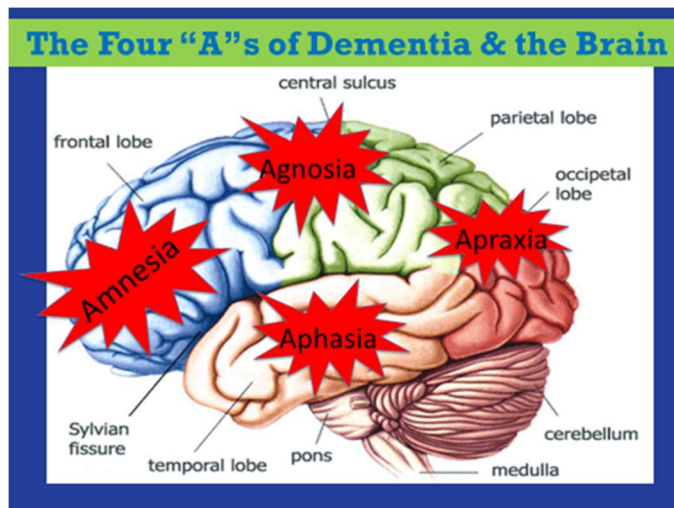
There are four main types of symptoms of dementia:

Amnesia – total or partial memory loss

Aphasia – total or partial loss of the ability to comprehend speech or written language

Aproxia – the inability to perform tasks or body movements even upon command

Agnosia – the inability to recognize and identify objects or persons



Note: There are three additional dementia related symptoms that are not depicted in the image above, but deserve to be mentioned: Anosognosia is the inability to recognize something is wrong; Apathy is the lack of ability to care, e.g. hygiene, participate in activities; Altered Perception is the misinterpretation of information from senses.

What are the most common types of dementia and other brain disorders?

Alzheimer's Disease - by far the most common and well-known type of dementia. The early stages also known as "onset" can be slow and subtle, and then progress over time.

Vascular – also known as multi-infarct, it is the second most common. It is caused by the lack of blood that carries oxygen and nutrients to a part of the brain causing problems with reasoning, planning, judgment, and memory.

Frontotemporal - several disorders that affect the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain that causes changes in personality and behavior.

Parkinson's Disease - a chronic and progressive movement disorder that initially causes tremor in one hand, stiffness or slowing of movement.

Huntington's Disease - a condition that leads to progressive degeneration of nerve cells in the brain that affects movement, cognitive functions, and emotions.

Taking a Closer Look at Dementia and how it can affect a person...



Imagine what it would feel like to have the inability to focus on a particular task like brushing your teeth or not being able to follow the strategy of your favorite card game anymore. What if

you're having trouble remembering a previous event, but a person keeps saying, "Don't you remember we just did this yesterday?" Think about how frustrating, confusing, and even scary this may feel and the impact of losing this ability can have on your self-esteem. All these things can happen when dementia progresses and the more we understand the person and learn to communicate in a way that is meaningful to them, the better their daily quality of life will become.

Let's talk about communication and how we can use it to help create a more positive dementia care experience.

Communication is in everything we do; our words, tone, posture, dress, facial expressions, etc. all communicate something to the other person, so it is very important for your verbal and non-verbal communication to match.

We'll start our discussion on communication by starting with the most obvious method – words.

Rarely do we just hear a message when someone is speaking to us. It is said that only 7% is communicated through actual words, 38% through tone and pitch of the person's voice, and the rest is body language.

There are some overall basics when talking to someone with dementia- things we know will trigger emotions in them, e.g. feelings of loss, lack of control, loss of independence. It is important to avoid arguing and reasoning – this only leads to anger, frustration, and circular arguing – sometimes even

aggression and agitation may result. For example, if a person with dementia believes the sky is green and you attempt to correct them by stating that the sky is not green, but blue, then this may lead to an argument. Do not argue, but rather simply agree.

Avoid the usage of absolutes and certain phrases like, “don’t you remember?” A simple question like, “don’t you remember” can cause the person to feel embarrassed.

More than words...

A person living with dementia may lose their ability to process language and speech so another effective method to communicate is to utilize the person’s senses. Using the five senses (see, hear, touch, taste, and smell) can help communicate a message when perhaps words alone are no longer effective. This requires awareness and planning, but as you learn what works it can help make communication easier for you and the person with dementia.

See: Visual cues, much like your facial expressions and hand gestures, are critical in communication. Did you know your eyes tell a story? Squinting your eyes or lowering your eyebrows can convey that you’re angry or mean so practice “soft eyes” or sympathetic expression in your eyes; a look of compassion.

Mimicking actions, like combing hair, may be beneficial as showing a person with dementia how to do something can be much more effective than simply telling. Be sure to make eye contact as this can show that you are interested and engaged in

the interaction; avoidance of making eye contact can express a disinterest or that you may be hiding something.

Hear: Just as important as the words we use, is how we say them. The tone, pitch, distance, and direction are all key points to consider. For example, be sure to stand in front of the person when speaking and try to be at eye level when possible. You never want to stand too close (about arm's length away or more) as this can violate their personal space and can potentially cause fear or agitation.

I remember when my mother would call my name and then say, "come here". Based on the tone and pitch in her voice I could tell whether I was in trouble or not. Try this exercise. Say the word "really" and each time you say it use a different tone and pitch. Try saying it to sound happy and excited, then as if you were questioning something, and lastly if you were disgusted. You'll notice the changes in pitch and tone will convey a completely different message even though you're repeating the same word.

Touch: As human beings we naturally enjoy physical contact. As we age, our opportunities to feel human touch diminishes and may find that it may only occur to meet physical care needs versus emotional ones. A gentle touch done appropriately can convey emotional comfort to a person with dementia especially if they are irritated, confused, or scared. However, as mentioned above it must be done appropriately. Always approach from the front so as not to startle or scare the person. Be sure to move slowly and carefully watch for their response.

Make eye contact and smile. Try to offer a gentle touch, e.g. place your hand gently on the person's shoulder, but be aware of the response you receive. If it appears that your attempt to touch is unwelcome, then immediately stop and maybe try a different approach that does not include touching.

Providing verbal instructions may not be sufficient to a person with dementia. Try using physical cues. For example, while walking alongside the person try using hand-under-hand guidance. This can help communicate a message of support and comfort or that I'm here to help you as well as help them get to where they are trying to go.

Taste: Another communication approach is through the use of food. As the saying goes, "food is personal". Food can help stir emotions and cause the recollection of certain events, people, and experiences. It's important to learn likes in taste and preferences, and offer choices. As we age our sensitivity to bitter tastes increases. Find out what the person enjoys and do your best to make sure it is always available. As you learn specific tastes and food choices, it can help create a more positive interaction and even at times help de-escalate certain situations.

Smell: Like food the sense of smell can evoke memories and affect emotions. Knowing what and how a person with dementia responds to certain smells can help create a positive experience. As with all other senses, smells can also communicate a message. For example, perhaps you are trying to communicate it is time to bathe, but the person may not be

able to understand the statement, “it’s time to bathe”. Instead, try turning on the shower and letting the hot steam in the room and the smell of lathered soap may help send the intended message, or using the smell of cooking bacon to communicate it’s time to eat.

Often our sense of smell is one of the first things we lose as we age so it’s important to keep this in mind as you use smell to communicate.

A brief overview of Actions & Expressions

Dementia affects the brain’s ability to deal with uncertainty, communicate concerns and fears, coping, and even self-sooth from keeping fears from becoming an overwhelming experience. As a result, this may lead to behaviors, actions, and expressions. This is a form of communication. An inability to articulate feelings and needs because of the dementia symptoms which may only leave the person with the ability to act them out with facial expressions, body language, or other actions. A few examples would be a person pacing, wandering, displaying agitation, or aggression. Typically, actions and expressions are in response to a need, concern, or fear that is being expressed.

Let’s talk about “triggers”...

A trigger is usually something in the environment, a task, or in the caregiver’s approach that initiates an emotional response. A few examples of triggers could be...

- Loud noises
- Speaking or moving too fast
- Surprising the person by coming up from behind
- Changes in the environment

The response will then trigger an action and/or expression.

Creating a positive care culture

The best way to figure out what someone is trying to tell you is by learning more about them as a person and understanding what makes them comfortable.

This means that we should not only look at the physical care needs, but also the overall quality of life. There is no one-size fits all style. Our communication approach should be customized to the unique needs and preferences of the person, and this can help create a more positive care experience, a beneficial exchange of communication that allows the person to feel heard, comforted, and most importantly understood.

Again, thank you for taking time to read this eBook. If you found it helpful, then I encourage you to visit our website at [Altruit Health Care \(altruithc.org\)](http://Altruit Health Care (altruithc.org)) and where you can learn more about our home care services. Visit our website and join our mailing list to receive a complimentary personalized care plan.

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