

Communicating With Residents Living With Dementia



This month's issue explores ways to interact with your residents who live with some form of dementia, or "brain change."

Getting to know your residents is the key to effective communication, which leads to positive relationships and prevents abuse and neglect.

Dementia Defined

Dementia is an "umbrella" term for several diseases that affect the memory, thinking abilities, and actions that get in the way of being able to do activities of daily living. Dementia is not a normal part of aging.
(Source: World Health Organization)

Understanding Communication

Communication is more than just talking and listening. It's how we relate to others. It is more than the words we say. It includes:

- ⇒ Body language
- ⇒ Tone of voice
- ⇒ Facial expressions
- ⇒ Eye contact



If these non-verbal cues don't match the your words, it can be very confusing for people living with dementia. Even people who cannot speak well themselves can pick up on these unspoken communications. Be kind with both your words and your actions when interacting with residents!

Persons Living With Dementia May...

Require lots of patience because they may:

- Have trouble finding the right words
- Use familiar words over and over again
- Invent words to describe familiar objects
- Easily lose their train of thought
- Find it hard to put their words in an order that makes sense to others
- Use words others may think are not appropriate
- Speak less often and use more non-verbal cues or gestures instead
- Need more time to understand information, concepts, directions, and requests

Want to Learn More?

Visit the Alzheimer's Association webpage for more information: <https://www.alz.org/>

alzheimer's  association®

"Be kind to me, for each day of my life is a long and desperate struggle. Your kindness may be the most special and important event of my day."

-A resident living with dementia

Tips and Tricks for Effective Communication



Here are some effective ways to communicate with residents living with dementia:

- 1) Ask only one question at a time and give your resident time to respond.
- 2) Approach your residents from the front and state who you are.
- 3) Call your residents by their name.
- 4) Use short, simple, and familiar words and sentences.
- 5) Talk slowly and clearly.
- 6) Simplify tasks into separate, clear steps: “First, run your toothbrush under water.” (pause for the resident to follow that direction) “Next, put the toothpaste on it...” (pause again), etc.
- 7) Turn your questions into answers: for example, rather than saying, “Do you need to use the bathroom?” try saying, “The bathroom is right here.”
- 8) Try to be positive: instead of saying, “Don’t go there,” try saying, “Let’s go here.”
- 9) Be aware of your body language: use positive and friendly facial expressions; maintain eye contact; point and use gestures if it helps the resident understand.
- 10) Write things down for the resident if that helps him or her.
- 11) If your resident is not paying attention, try again later.
- 12) Be specific: for example, instead of saying, “Here it is,” try saying, “Here is *your hat*.”

Avoid talking down to your residents. Always be respectful and honor their dignity.

To Report Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation

Of a nursing home resident by a staff member:
Call State of Michigan LARA: **(800) 882-6006**

Of an older adult living at home, in assisted living, adult foster care, home for the aged, or a nursing home, by anyone who is *not* a staff member:

Call **Adult Protective Services: (855) 444-3911**

If you think a crime has occurred: Call your local police/sheriff department (and LARA)—If the danger is immediate, call 911

Thank you for caring...



For More Information

Long Term Care Ombudsman: (517) 394-3027

Tri-County Office on Aging: (800) 405-9141

The *Michigan Elder Justice Initiative (MEJI)*'s ***Excellence in Caring*** newsletter is published with grant funds from the **Tri-County Office on Aging.**

Written by: **Tammy Cordes**
Michigan Elder Justice Initiative
15851 South U.S. 27
Lansing, MI 48906
517-827-8030

Questions or comments? Contact **Tammy Cordes** at: tcordes@meji.org

Content is for educational purposes and does not represent professional advice.