

Communicating with Someone with Alzheimer's

As an individual progresses through an Alzheimer's/dementia journey, many changes in that person's ability to communicate will occur. For example, the affected person will most likely experience difficulty finding words to accurately express ideas or needs, familiar words or nonsense words may be substituted for forgotten words, or speech may cease all together.

The individual will also most likely experience challenges with understanding words that are being spoken to him/her, especially as the disease progresses. To assist you, the family member, with being able to maintain communication with your loved one, we suggest the following strategies:

- Slow down when speaking and allow your loved one extra time to express his/her thoughts.
- If your loved one gets "stuck" gently offer the word you think is being sought.
- If a nonsense word is used, do not draw attention to the incorrect word. Instead, try and figure out what your loved one was trying to say and respond accordingly.
- Your loved one may become frustrated when words are not easily found. Remain calm and supportive in helping him/her to express thoughts.
- If your loved one swears at you, remember, the word that was used was probably the one that was most accessible at that moment. Try to assist your loved one in dealing with what prompted the negative emotion.
- Point, gesture and demonstrate ideas to your loved one. Often, these nonverbal expressions will fill in the blanks left when words begin to fail.
- Try not to rely on reasoning or logic when communicating with your loved one. Often, this type of thinking will be too complex for someone with dementia.
- Be careful not to correct them, it will only make them feel worse about the situation. Reminisce on a happy memory, create a diversion, or ask for assistance from your loved one. You could even join your loved one's perception of reality and respond accordingly. It will be less stressful and much happier for both of you in the end.