

Creating a Successful Visit

Family members of loved ones with declining communication abilities often tell us they are unsure of how to interact with their loved ones when visiting the Memory Care neighborhoods. We realize this can be a confusing time for both the family member and the resident; therefore, we would like to offer the following suggestions by stage:

Early-stage dementia

Communication abilities should still be intact; however, short-term memories will likely be problematic. Also, finding the correct word in a conversation may provide a challenge for your loved one. We encourage you to:

- Talk about things that rely on long-term memories. For example, do not talk about what happened this past Christmas, instead, talk about a favorite Christmas from your childhood. Going through an older photo album together can be very enjoyable for the both of you.
- Do not ask questions that rely on memory. Rather, supply your loved one with the correct answer in case he/she has forgotten. For example, do not ask what your loved one has done today, instead ask a team member, and remind him/her of the positive things that have occurred. "I hear you had a great time on the outing to Dairy Queen today!" is an appropriate way to begin.
- Join your loved one in a meal or group activity

in the neighborhood. The residents' family members are our family members! Joining in on the neighborhood events will maintain your involvement in your loved one's life and sharing your experiences may bring you closer together.

Middle-stage dementia

Communication will most likely begin to become difficult in this stage. Words may become difficult to express and contextual reading abilities may begin to falter. To help with these challenges:

- Bring objects to share with your loved one. In this stage of dementia, abstract conversations may be difficult for your loved one. Bring pictures, favorite treasures, favorite snack items, pets, etc. These things are easily enjoyed without relying on words.
- Ask your loved one to "help" you with a task. Straighten his/her closet, fold laundry together, or cut coupons, for example. Again, it allows your loved one to interact with you and experience a positive accomplishment without relying on words.
- Consider a short trip out if your loved one enjoys it. Go to a favorite treat place, to a lovely park, or just enjoy the countryside. Many people in our senior population were accustomed to simple Sunday drives with family members.

Late-stage dementia

It may help you to remember that a loved one in the later stages in his/her journey will respond best if you offer interactions that “speak” directly to his/her senses. Relying on words or social interactions may make both of you feel very frustrated. Try the following instead:

- Play or sing favorite music for your loved one. Music will often reach those in later stages when nothing else will.
- Rub lotion onto your loved one’s hands and arms, or offer a soothing back or neck massage. This will help you to convey your loving touch and can make your loved one feel wonderful!
- Offer taste experiences. Sweet and fruity tastes are best recognized at this point. Even if your loved one is on a special diet puddings, ice cream or flavored ice chips are sometimes allowed. Please check with a nurse before offering.
- Bring large pictures with bright colors. Calendars or coffee table books containing pictures of your loved one’s favorite things may be very engaging.