

Communicating During An Alzheimer's Journey

If In a recent article by the Alzheimer's Association, experts shared strategies for communicating with someone throughout the different stages of Alzheimer's Disease. This information is invaluable as it addresses changes in communication you may see as the disease progresses, (such as difficulty finding words, easily losing a train of thought, relying on gestures, etc.) and provides advice for caregivers as they try to respond to these changes.

COMMUNICATION IN THE EARLY STAGE

In this stage, the article states that an individual is still able to participate in meaningful conversation and engage in social activities; however, they may repeat stories, feel overwhelmed or have difficulty finding the right words. Here are the tips shared for successful communication during this stage:

- Don't make assumptions about a person's ability to communicate. The disease affects everyone differently.
- Don't exclude the person from conversations.
- Speak directly to the person if you want to know how he or she is doing.
- Take time to listen to how the person is feeling, what he or she is thinking or may need.
- Give the person time to respond. Don't interrupt or finish sentences unless he or she asks for help finding a word or finishing a sentence.
- Talk with the person about what he or she is still comfortable doing and what they may need help with.
- Explore which method of communication is most comfortable for the person. This could include face-to-face conversations, email or phone calls.
- It's OK to laugh. Sometimes humor lightens the mood and makes communication easier.
- Be honest and frank about your feelings. Don't pull away; your friendship and support are important.

COMMUNICATION IN THE MIDDLE STAGE

The second stage of Alzheimer's can last for many years. During this time, communication will become more difficult. Advice for this stage includes:

- Allow time for response so the person can think about what he or she wants to say.
- Engage the person in one-on-one conversation in a quiet space that has minimal distractions.
- Speak slowly and clearly.

- Maintain eye contact. It shows you care about what he or she is saying.
- Avoid criticizing or correcting. Instead, listen and try to find the meaning in what is being said. Repeat what was said to clarify.
- Avoid arguing. If the person says something you don't agree with, let it be.
- Don't overwhelm the person with lengthy requests. Offer clear, step-by-step instructions for tasks.
- Ask one question at a time. And ask "yes" or "no" questions such as, "Would you like some coffee?" rather than "What would you like to drink?"
- Give visual cues. To help demonstrate the task, point or touch the item you want the individual to use. Or, begin the task for the person.
- Written notes can also be helpful during this time.

COMMUNICATION IN THE LAST STAGE

In the last stage of the disease, a person may rely on nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions or vocal sounds. Communication is difficult, so try the following tactics:

- Treat the person with dignity and respect. Avoid talking down to the person or as if he or she isn't there.
- Always approach the person from the front and identify yourself.
- Encourage nonverbal communication. If you don't understand what is being said, ask the person to point or gesture.
- Sometimes the emotions being expressed are more important than what is being said. Look for the feelings behind words or sounds.
- Use touch, sights, sounds, smells and tastes as a form of communication with the person.
- It's OK if you don't know what to do or say; your presence and friendship are what's most important.

We hope this helps you and your loved one understand each other better throughout their Alzheimer's journey. For other information or advice, please contact the Memory Care experts at our campus.

