

## Learning to communicate with a person living with dementia

Staying connected to the people we love is done through all types of communication – not just talking. In fact, about 93% of all communication is non-verbal. That is, our facial expression, tone of voice and body language provide most of what is said, not the actual words. This is great news as we continue to communicate with people living with dementia. While memory may fade and words become jumbled, our ability to communicate love, tenderness, safety, approval and more can all be done without words. A gentle touch, a warm smile, a relaxed posture, and a soft and patient tone of voice all communicate warmth and acceptance. Because the “emotional memory” stays until the end, people with dementia can “feel” our communication – both good and bad. Here are some dementia-friendly communication tips that will help you and your loved one communicate successfully:

- Treat the person with dignity and respect. Call him by the preferred name/title. Don't ever speak to the person as if he was a child.
- Be aware of your feelings. Remember, 93% of what you say, the person will read by your tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. If you are angry or upset, expect your loved one will respond accordingly. If you are anxious or worried, your loved one will become anxious too.
- Be patient and supportive. Try to “listen” even if you don't understand what is being “said.” Look beyond the words. If your loved one looks upset, acknowledge it by saying, “I see you are upset.” Give her plenty of time to respond to questions. If you see her struggling, tell her to take her time or perhaps give her the word she is looking for.
- Offer comfort and reassurance. When your loved one becomes frustrated trying to communicate, let them know it's okay.
- Avoid criticizing or correcting. He is trying his best and this will only add to frustration. (How do you like being criticized or corrected?)
- Avoid arguing. Does it really matter if she is right or wrong? Just go with the conversation. Let it go. This is NOT about you. Not only will you both walk away angry, your loved one won't remember why her feelings are hurt.
- Avoid quizzing – especially over recent information. Your loved one has a condition that affects memory so expect things will be forgotten. Instead of saying, “Do you remember?,” try, “I remember when...”

When you and others use these tips, you will find that communication will be successful for all.