

Communication Tips for Serving Individuals With Dementia

Begin



dementia care
specialists
a CPI specialized offering

Communication—Vital to Function and Well-Being.....	2
Adapting Your Communication Style	3
Tip 1: Gain Attention and Trust	4
Tip 2: Approach From the Front	5
Tip 3: Minimize Distractions	6
Tip 4: Lead With the Person’s Name	7
Tip 5: Avoid Pronouns	8
Tip 6: Use Short Sentences.....	9
Tip 7: Wait for a Response	10
Tip 8: Use Visual or Tactile Cues	11
Tip 9: Watch Your Nonverbal Message.....	12
Tip 10: Be Patient, Supportive, and Friendly.....	13
About Dementia Care Specialists	14
For More Information.....	15

Communication—the expressive or receptive exchange of information—is vital to the functional success and emotional well-being of the person with dementia. Difficulty expressing needs and/or understanding another person is extremely stressful to both the individual with dementia and the caregiver. In addition, any type of communication breakdown can contribute significantly to excess disability.

- **Expressive communication** is the ability to express one's needs and thoughts in various forms, such as through speech, body language, and facial expressions.
- **Receptive communication** is the ability to understand communication from others, including messages sent via words, body language, and facial expressions.

Adapting Your Communication Style

As a caregiver, there are ways to maintain effective communication throughout all stages of dementia by **adapting your communication style**.

Dementia Care Specialists (DCS) offers the following strategies to help raise awareness and facilitate communication when caring for an individual with dementia or related cognitive challenges. Using these tips in combination with a person-centered care approach that is rooted in dignity and respect can help **improve function, emotional well-being, and quality of life** for the individual with dementia and the caregiver.

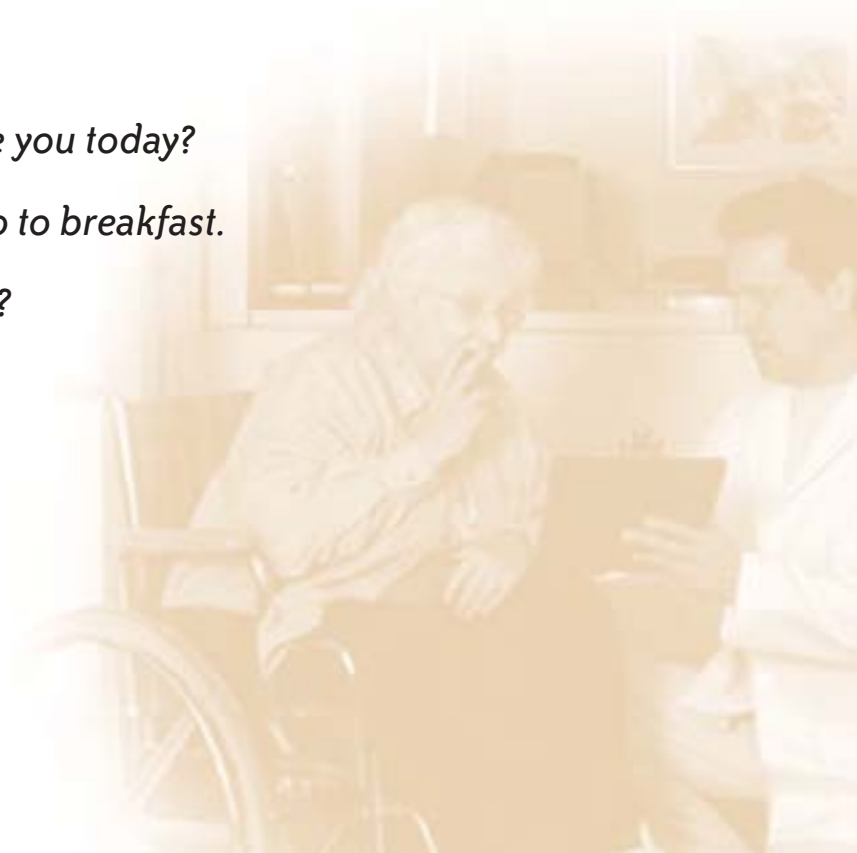


Tip 1: Gain Attention and Trust

Before you make any attempt to communicate, make sure you have gained the individual's attention. It is also important that the person in your care feels safe with you and that you have his or her agreement and approval to proceed.

Examples:

- *Ed, is your daughter coming to see you today?*
- *Good morning Betty. It's time to go to breakfast.*
- *Les, would you like to take a walk?*



Tip 2: Approach From the Front

When you approach an individual, always try to do so from the front so he or she has an opportunity to recognize you. Keep in mind that in the later stages of dementia, range of vision may become more limited, so you may need to make further adaptations.

Before delivering your message, make direct eye contact (unless culturally unacceptable) and stand or sit in front of the individual before proceeding. During the conversation, maintaining eye contact helps show that you are listening, builds trust, promotes respect, and indicates that you care about the person.

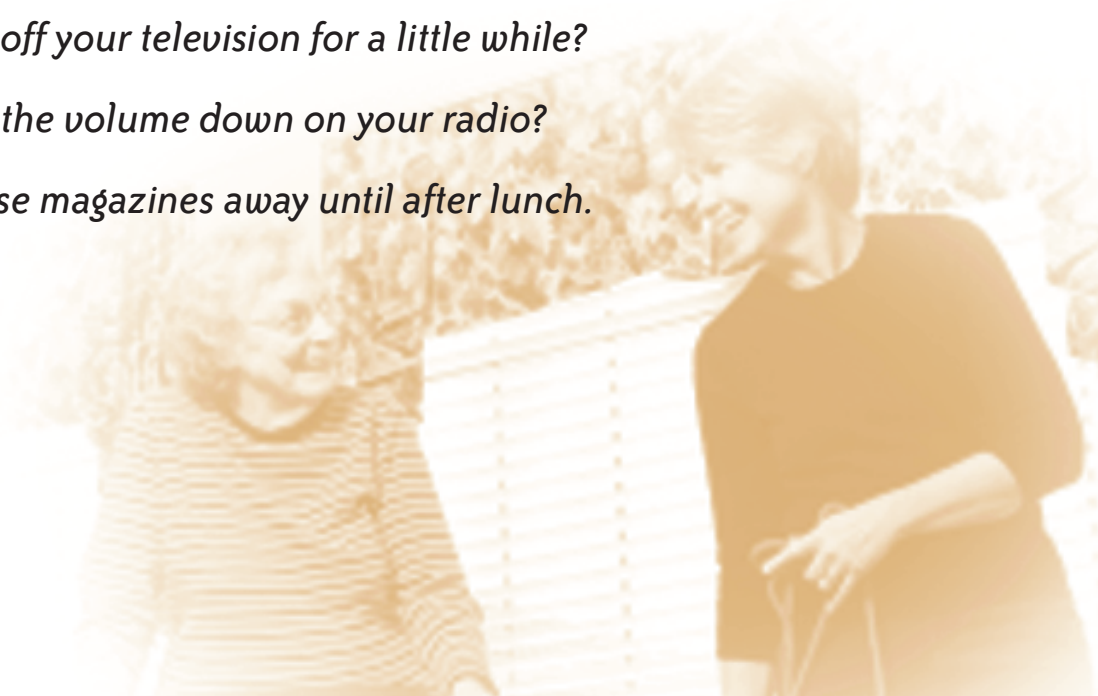


Tip 3: Minimize Distractions

Individuals with dementia are often easily distracted by both sights and sounds. Before communicating, try to eliminate all unnecessary sources of stimulation. If you need to handle the individual's personal belongings, be sure to ask his or her permission first.

Examples:

- *Frances, can I turn off your television for a little while?*
- *John, can you turn the volume down on your radio?*
- *Helen, let's put these magazines away until after lunch.*



Tip 4: Lead With the Person's Name

Calling a person with dementia by name shows respect, and identifying yourself often helps the individual with orientation. Leading with the person's name will also catch his or her attention, improving the person's ability to attend to your question or request.

Examples:

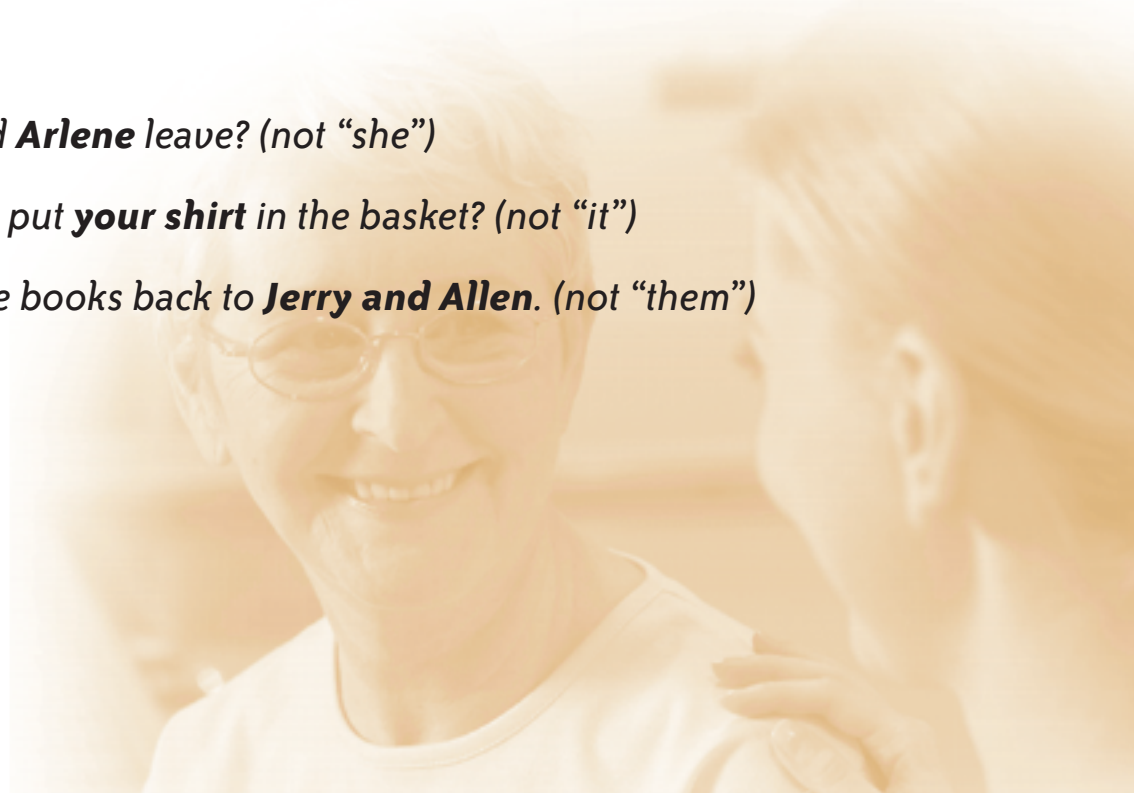
- *Hi Arthur, I'm Carrie. Are you ready to play cards?*
- *Good Morning Ethel. You have a visitor coming today, don't you?*
- *George, it's Becky. How are you feeling today?*

Tip 5: Avoid Pronouns

Pronouns are often convenient substitutions for nouns, but using pronouns when communicating with an individual with dementia can cause confusion and frustration. Pronouns are words like it, he, his, she, her, them, they, those, etc. Speak clearly and simply, and avoid pronouns as much as possible.

Examples:

- *Marvin, when did **Arlene** leave? (not “she”)*
- *Caroline, can you put **your shirt** in the basket? (not “it”)*
- *Tony, let’s give the books back to **Jerry and Allen**. (not “them”)*

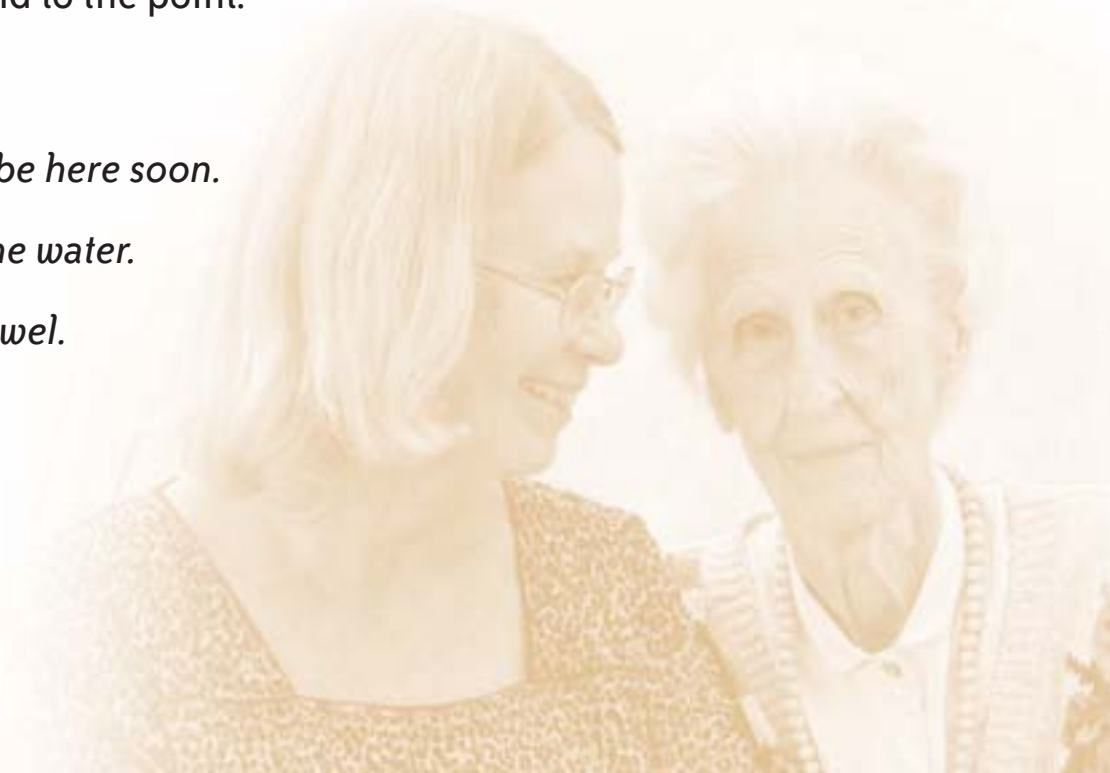


Tip 6: Use Short Sentences

Long or run-on sentences filled with lots of information can be confusing to someone with dementia. A sentence like “Turn the water on and wash your face because your daughter is coming to see you this afternoon and we want you to be freshened up before her visit” will most likely not be fully comprehended. Keep your sentences short and to the point.

Examples:

- *Bob, your son will be here soon.*
- *Stephen, turn on the water.*
- *Barbara, use the towel.*



Tip 7: Wait for a Response

Research shows that response time for a person with dementia can be delayed by up to 30 seconds. As a caregiver, this delay can be very frustrating. It can also be misinterpreted as the person's inability to comprehend your message.

When communicating with an individual with dementia, allow time for your words to be processed. During processing, do not distract the individual. Be patient and you will often receive the response you may have missed.

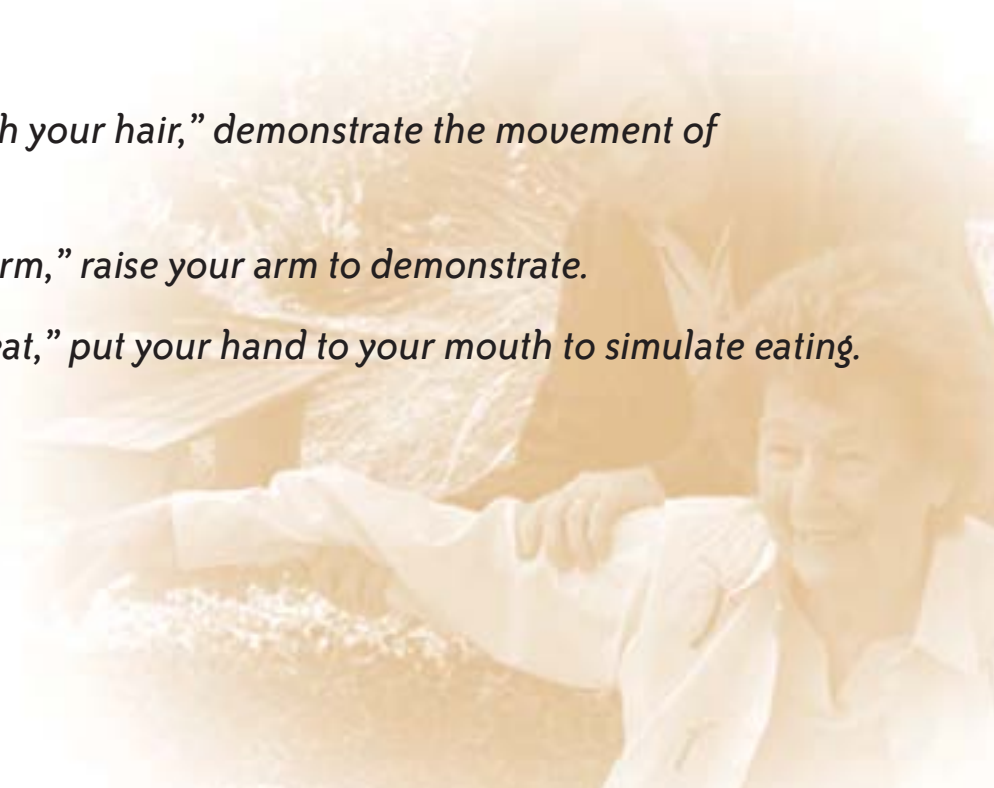


Tip 8: Use Visual or Tactile Cues

Words alone may not be enough to convey the meaning of your message. This can lead to a lack of response and the conclusion that the individual cannot or will not do what is being asked. Use visual demonstrations and tactile/hands-on cues to accompany your words.

Examples:

- *While saying “please brush your hair,” demonstrate the movement of hair brushing.*
- *While saying “raise your arm,” raise your arm to demonstrate.*
- *While saying “it’s time to eat,” put your hand to your mouth to simulate eating.*

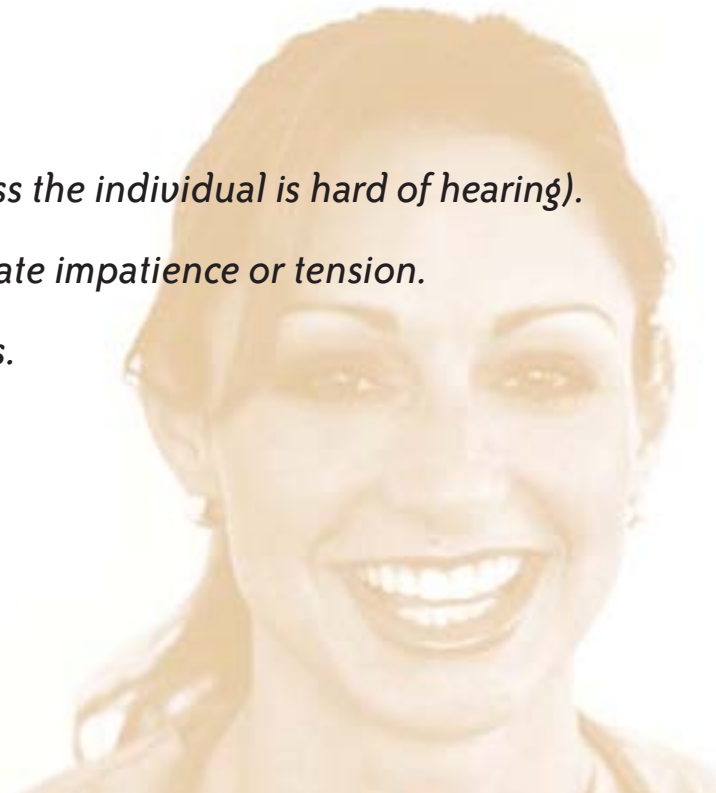


Tip 9: Watch Your Nonverbal Message

A key aspect of communication is nonverbal. In addition to the words you use, your tone of voice, volume, body language, and facial expressions also send a message every time you speak. Nonverbal messages can be both intentional and unintentional, so be careful not to change the meaning of your message with your nonverbal cues.

Examples:

- *Keep your volume at a normal level (unless the individual is hard of hearing).*
- *Avoid crossing your arms as this can indicate impatience or tension.*
- *Remember that a smile is often contagious.*



Tip 10: Be Patient, Supportive, and Friendly

At every stage of dementia, there is a person behind the patient. Let the person know that he or she has your full attention. Focus on the feelings related to the communication, not just the facts.

Whenever possible and appropriate, use additional forms of communication to express support, such as touches and smiles. Good communication brings rewards to both the sender and the receiver.



About Dementia Care Specialists (DCS)

DCS, a division of CPI, has been facilitating training programs aimed at achieving positive outcomes for persons with dementia since 1999. From this ground-breaking DCS training, a new standard of care—Dementia Capable Care—has emerged. Dementia Capable Care is rooted in a best-abilities person-centered perspective, and communication is an integral part of this approach.

We encourage you to help lead the way to the higher quality standard of Dementia Capable Care. It is our belief that individuals with dementia—and those who provide for their care—deserve nothing less.



For More Information

For more information about how to implement Dementia Capable Care at your facility or how it can help improve function, safety, and quality of life for persons with dementia:

- Visit ***www.crisisprevention.com*** or
- Call ***1-877-816-4524***.

The website also has more information about additional training programs and resources from CPI including:

- *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*[®] Program
- *PrepareTraining*[®] Program

