

Communication strategies

When speaking with a loved one who has Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, it's very helpful to employ communication strategies that help us engage in more meaningful interactions.

These approaches make interactions more pleasant and less frustrating for everybody, especially the person living with dementia, who is told 'no' many times a day....

The 3 Rs

RIGHT: A person with dementia is always "right." Use your creativity to enter their reality, and try to see things from their perspective. If they're talking about looking for their mother, don't tell them she died 30 years ago, instead, talk with them about something related, such as what they love about her. This establishes trust and rapport. Remember: Focus on the feelings they're expressing, rather than the accuracy of their facts.

REASSURE: Once we have stepped into their world and invested in the same reality, we can give comforting reassurance to the person with dementia. We can tell them, or show them through our actions, that they are safe, they are loved, and we are here with them.

REDIRECT: Having joined their reality and shown we are here for them, we can redirect their train of thought. We can ask a question that changes the subject, or get up and move to a new location, commenting on the new surroundings.

"Yes, and..."

The 'Yes, and...' approach is an attitude that is helpful (and generous) to have when approaching someone with dementia.

Improvisation - known as "Improv" in the comedy and acting worlds - is when we go with the "Yes, and..." flow while interacting with someone in the world as they're seeing it. It requires us to "be in the moment" with them. If they tell you something untrue, such as they used to roller-skate on a street that's new to them, don't contradict them. Say something like, 'Yes, and did you have fun doing that?' (For a video that provides advice on the improv approach, go to ... bit.ly/3NTQ4Wi)

These strategies are still considered successful even if they have to be repeated frequently throughout the interaction. Using 'Yes, and...' allows you to use the 3 Rs - reassure and redirect them, while letting them know they are right.



More tips can be found at www.theerscenter.org