

COMMUNICATION



Saint Joseph's Shankill
Dedicated to Dementia Care


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COMMUNICATION

"Hi", "Hello", simple words we use in everyday conversation, often followed by a handshake, a hug, and always a warm smile!

Do these words and gestures make a big difference to me?

How does that warm smile, handshake or hug make me feel?

Most people enjoy a good chat and quality time talking with friends and family, but what happens if you can't find the right words anymore, or what if the conversation is moving too fast and it is too hard to follow? Or what if you couldn't remember how to say anything?

This is what happens with the progression of dementia.

We can support the conversation of people with dementia, by taking time to think about how we communicate.

Communication relating to feelings and attitudes is made up of three parts:

55% is body language which is the message we give out by our facial expression, posture and gestures

38% is the tone and pitch of our voice

7% is the words we use

These statistics* highlight the importance of how carers present themselves to a person living with dementia. Positive body language such as a smile, relaxed approach and presence will make the person living with dementia feel comfortable and relaxed and at ease.

Remember negative body language such as sighs and raised eyebrows, slouching, apathetic approach can also easily be picked up by the person you care for living with dementia.

At Saint Joseph's we recognise that each person living with dementia is unique in the way the illness affects them and their ability to speak or communicate with others. Difficulties in communicating thoughts and feelings vary with each individual. To care for someone in the best way possible, it is essential that we can communicate in the best possible way with each other.



We can achieve this by understanding the changes that occur in the ability to communicate effectively if you are living with dementia. These changes may include;

- Difficulty in finding a word. Or they may use a totally unrelated word in place of the one they cannot remember
- They may speak fluently, but not make sense
- They may not be able to understand what you are saying or only be able to grasp part of it
- Writing and reading skills may also deteriorate
- They may lose the normal social conventions of conversations and interrupt or ignore a speaker, or fail to respond when spoken to
- They may have difficulty expressing emotions appropriately

We must remember that people living with dementia still maintain their feelings and emotions, even when they may not understand what is being said to them or be able to verbally respond. It is important to always maintain the person's dignity and self esteem. Any verbal and non verbal communications should be respectful and polite, when approaching someone living with dementia.



So let's look at what helps us communicate when...

... in Conversation #dontforget to...

- remain calm and talk in a gentle, matter of fact way
- keep sentences short and simple, focusing on one item at a time
- allow plenty of time for what you have said to be understood
- speak simply and slowly, but not in a patronising way
- avoid double messages or questions eg: it is better not to ask 'would you like a cup of tea or coffee?' but rather 'would you like a cup of coffee?'
- use names and to give reminders of who people are whenever you can, such as "your son Sean" or "your grand-daughter Aoife"
- be flexible and always allow plenty of time for a response. Where appropriate, use touch to keep the person's attention and to communicate feelings of warmth and affection.
- avoid arguing or bossing the person around



... Using Body Language #dontforget to...

- use hand gestures and facial expressions to make yourself understood
- ensure that your facial expression and body language are relaxed
- point or demonstrate what you mean
- touch and hold someone's hand, it may help keep their attention and it also shows them that you care
- not to be embarrassed by a display of emotion, whether it is positive or negative, it could just mean they are frustrated as they don't know what they want to say
- a warm smile and shared laughter can often communicate more than words ever can

.....Creating the best Environment #dontforget to....

- try to avoid competing noises such as TV or radio or any other background sounds
- approach the person from the front, and establish eye-contact
- be in the person's line of vision and try and stay still while talking to them
- maintain regular routines to help minimise confusion
- check that hearing and eyesight are not impaired. Glasses or a hearing aid may help some people. Check that hearing aids are functioning correctly and glasses are cleaned regularly



Do's and Don't's of Communication

DO	DON'T
Talk to the person in a tone of voice that conveys respect and dignity	Talk to the person in 'baby talk' or as if you are talking to a child
Keep your explanations short. Use clear and flexible language	Use complicated words or phrases and long sentences
Maintain eye contact by positioning yourself at the person's eye level	Glare at, or 'eyeball' the person you are talking to, or argue with them.
Look directly at the person, use the person's name and ensure that you have their attention before you speak. Always begin by identifying yourself and explain what it is you propose to do	Begin a task without explaining who you are or what you are about to do. Talk to the person with eye contact, not, for example, while rummaging in a drawer to select clothing.
Use visual cues whenever possible	Try and compete with a distracting environment
Be realistic in expectations	Provoke a catastrophic reaction through unrealistic expectations or by asking the person to do more than one task at a time
Observe and attempt to interpret the person's non-verbal communication	Disregard your own non/verbal communication
Paraphrase and use a calm and reassuring tone of voice	Disregard talk that may seem to be 'rambling'
Repeat back key words eg walk/ chocolate that the person may use in an otherwise incoherent sentence	Ignore incoherent speech as there may be a key word used that determines an important message
Speak slowly and say individual words clearly. Use strategies to reduce the effect of hearing impairment	Shout or talk too fast
Encourage talk about things that they are familiar with	Interrupt unless it can be helpful
Use touch if appropriate	Attempt to touch or invade their personal space if they are showing signs of fear or aggression.
Figure out the concept/feeling behind the word eg 'mum' or 'mammy' may mean 'I need comfort'	Ignore key words that may signify feelings/emotions

