

Staying Connected through Communication Dementia Changes Communication

Staying connected requires working together. People do not automatically know what you need. Let them know.

Communicating with others when you have changes in your own memory and thinking:

1. **Give yourself some grace.**

Try to not be critical of yourself when you cannot do things the same way you used to do them. You are doing the best you can for what your body will allow you to do right now.

2. **Help your family and friends.**

You are not being a burden if you let people know what is difficult for you regarding communication. Ask for help with communication. Many people have told us that when they disclose, or share with their family and friends what they are having difficulty with, family and friends can be more understanding. Try this sentence: "It helps me when you _____ when we talk."

3. **Explore new conversations and activities together.**

Old friends may not call or visit as much. They often want to stay in touch, but they don't know what to say or how to talk to you. Let them know what you enjoy talking about or doing now. Invite them to do something that you enjoy together that does not depend on a lot of conversation such as watching a TV show or movie together, or working on a craft project together.

4. **Some times of the day are naturally better than other times for conversations.**

Having a conversation may be easier at some times of day or in some situations than others. If you are tired or having more difficulty than usual, let the other person know. Schedule a time to talk later. Plan to have important conversations at a time you are most rested.

5. **Reduce distractions during conversations.**

Turn off TV's, radios, or other distractions. Try to have conversations in quiet places.

6. **Write down information you need to remember.**

If there is information you need to remember after a conversation, such as an appointment or something you need to do, write it down. Or ask the person you are talking with to write it down. Put a reminder in your phone or on your calendar.

7. **Connect with people who know what you are experiencing and can help.**

As much as your family and friends care about you, they cannot fully understand what you are experiencing. Connect with professionals and other people who are experiencing the same thing. Here are some examples:

- a. **Talk to your doctor** about your difficulties with communication.
- b. **Ask your doctor to refer you to a speech-language pathologist.** Speech-language pathologists often work with people with memory changes to help them manage their day to day activities and to communicate with other people.
- c. **Connect with groups in-person.** Look for groups of people with dementia who may be meeting near where you live for support and camaraderie. Your doctor or other healthcare provider may know of some groups.
- d. **Connect with safe online groups.** Some people enjoy joining online support groups. Consider groups backed by a reputable organization, or with strong moderators who keep content safe.



SPEAC Lab

Supporting
Participation, Equity, and Access
to Communication

<https://sites.uw.edu/speaclab>

Communicating with a family member or friend who has changes in memory and thinking:

1. Give yourself some grace.

This is difficult. While you want to be present for your loved one, this impacts you too, and it is ok to acknowledge that.

2. Do not expect your loved one to be the way they used to be.

Do not be critical of your loved one when they are not able to do the same things they used to do. They are doing their best for what their body will allow them to do now.

3. Talk to them as the adult that they are.

Do not 'talk down' to them in childish manner. Even if they need you to repeat something or simplify what you are saying, keep your mannerisms when you interact with them appropriate for the adult they are.

4. Plan for extra time for conversations.

If you need to tell them something, you might have to tell them one thing at a time instead of telling them many things at once. Give them extra time to respond to you in a conversation.

5. Do not shout at them.

Shouting does not help them remember. If they do have hearing problems, help them see an audiologist to get their hearing tested and perhaps get hearing aids (their doctor can refer them to an audiologist).

6. Say it another way.

If they do not understand you after you have repeated something to them, try rephrasing it. Sometimes saying it a different way or even adding gestures or pictures to show them helps them understand.

7. Ask them what helps them to communicate.

Do not be afraid to ask them, in a supportive way, what they prefer or what helps them when they are having a conversation. You are not insulting them if you bring up their difficulties having conversations, especially if you do so in a supportive way. Ask them what they think helps before assuming you know what is best.

8. Communication may be easier at some times of day than others.

Just because your loved one could do something fairly easily at one time does not mean they will be able to do it as easily a few hours later. If a conversation is difficult, ask your loved one if you can postpone it until a time when they are more rested. Plan to have important conversations at a time your loved one is rested.

9. Reduce distractions where you are having conversations.

Turn off the TV, radio, or other distractions. Have conversations in quiet places.

10. Help them 'back-up' information they need

If there is something they need to do or remember, help them write it down, enter it as a reminder in their phone, or create some other way to 'back up' the information instead of relying on their memory.

11. Arguing with your loved one will not help them remember.

If they cannot remember something, or if they remember it incorrectly, trying to convince them of something different may not be useful. Do not quiz them to test their memory. However, if their difficulties with memory pose a safety concern, do be sure you, or someone, is ensuring they are safe.

12. Help other friends and family connect with your loved one.

Let them know how to best communicate with your loved one. Suggest activities that do not involve a lot of conversation such as watching a show together or doing a craft together or some other shared interest.



SPEAC Lab

Supporting
Participation, Equity, and Access
to Communication

<https://sites.uw.edu/speaclab>