



Communicating and Engaging with Someone Who Has Dementia

People living with dementia enjoy life, especially if they have the support of their family and friends. Your efforts to communicate, socialize and acknowledge a person living with dementia are important to helping them stay connected, feel valued and continue to experience joy in life.

Communicating with the person living with dementia:

- Be patient, don't interrupt. They may have trouble remembering words or lose their train of thought. Give them time to finish what they are saying.
- If they are experiencing difficulty or appear distressed, ask direct questions such as "is there someone you would like me to call?", rather than "What would you like me to do?"
- If they become repetitive, change the topic or suggest doing something physical like a walk, making a cup of tea or having a snack.
- Use touch, such as putting your hand on their arm or shoulder to help refocus them.
- Start the conversation. Speak slowly and clearly, keep your sentences short and keep your tone of voice positive, friendly and calm.
- Make eye contact. If the person is sitting down, lower your body position to their level.
- Wave and say hello; make a comment: "It's a nice day" or "Your garden looks great" etc.
- Acknowledge what they have said, even if they don't answer your question, or what they say seems out of context; show that you've heard them and encourage them to elaborate.
- Rephrase questions if they are struggling to answer.
- Minimize distractions (such as a radio playing too loudly), but check with them first.

Coping with memory problems:

- Someone living with dementia is likely to experience memory loss, confusion and difficulty learning new things. They may struggle to understand where they are, where things are, and how things work. If you see someone struggling to figure out how to work something or if they look lost, ask if they would like help.
- A calendar or diary can help the person remember dates.
- Notes, pictures and labels can remind the person where things are.
- Photos can help the person remember people and events and are a great conversation starter.

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Supporting a person to be active:

- Find activities you can do together based on the person's hobbies, skills and interests such as walking, dancing, golfing or gardening.
- Break tasks or activities down into steps; simplify or shorten the time you spend on them if necessary. Take breaks between activities.

Keep in touch:

- Visit and spend time with the person or phone if you can't visit.
- Offer to drive them to visit others.

Support the Caregiver:

- Schedule a time when you will come over to visit or call; this might allow the caregiver to plan to go out for a coffee with friends or run some errands.
- Ask if you can pick anything up at the grocery store when you are going.
- If you feel comfortable, offer to take the person living with dementia for a walk or out for coffee. Use the buddy system and ask another friend to join you.
- If you notice the caregiver is struggling, offer to source out some support options. Call the Alzheimer Society for help or encourage the caregiver to seek out help.

For more information, or to provide feedback, please contact:

Alzheimer Society of Calgary
www.alzheimercalgary.ca
403.290.0110

OR

Dementia Network Calgary
www.dementianetworkcalgary.ca

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