



adasa  
Association for Dementia and Alzheimer's of South Africa

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# Compassionate Communication

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Compassionate communication involves the heart, mind, ears, and eyes when communicating. It is more than the ability to exchange words but is the ability to connect with someone.

Communication is a two-way process and a key element in providing person-centered care to a person with dementia. (Care that focuses on the needs, preferences, values, and beliefs of the person, including their life history and other things that are important to them.)

Dementia gradually destroys brain cells and reduces a person's ability to speak and understand speech. Losing the ability to communicate can be one of the most frustrating challenges for people living with dementia, their families, and caregivers.

### **Some changes due to dementia might include:**

- Difficulty in finding a word. A related word might be used instead of one they cannot remember.
- They may speak fluently, but not make sense.
- They may not be able to understand what you are saying.
- Writing and reading skills may also deteriorate.
- They may lose the normal social rules of conversations and interrupt or ignore a speaker, or fail to respond when spoken to.
- They may have difficulty expressing emotions appropriately.

# Communication guidelines

The person with dementia still has feelings and emotions even though they might not understand what is being said. They are sensitive to body language and could pick up on your mood.

**Approach the person from the front, make eye contact and give them full attention when they are speaking.**

**Give simple choices, a maximum of 2 – avoid creating complicated choices or options.**

**Keep sentences short and simple, focusing on one idea at a time, speak clearly and slowly.**

**Talk to the person as an adult, not a child, and do not ridicule what they say.**

**Remain calm, talk in a gentle way, and keep your tone of voice positive and friendly.**

**Move at the pace of the person according to their time and place allowing them plenty of time to answer.**

**If possible, sit down face-to-face in a quiet, calm place. Try to avoid competing noises such as TV or radio.**

**A warm smile and shared laughter can often communicate more than words can.**

## Not to do

- Avoid arguing, reasoning, and confronting.
- Avoid criticizing or correcting.
- Avoid asking open-ended questions or reminding them that they are forgetting.
- Avoid direct questions that rely on a good memory.
- Don't belittle or humiliate them, treat them with respect.
- Don't talk about the person with their family/caregiver in front of them as if they are not there.

