



At Arbor Springs, we are dedicated to helping families manage the realities of dementia with as much love, dignity, and knowledge as possible. This monthly e-newsletter is our way of offering helpful tips and insights that will hopefully make your days with your loved one a little easier, happier, and calm.

Last month we talked about communication being one of the major difficulties persons with dementia face, affecting not only their ability to process what is being said to them but also their ability to express their own needs and wants. We discussed the **'The Do's For Effective Communication'** which included: setting the stage for communication, slowing down your communication, simplifying your verbal communications, stating things in a positive manner, and being aware of your non-verbal communication.

Some methods of communication will actually hinder your interactions with your loved one. They are more likely to further confuse him/her or add to his/her frustration. These non-effective methods should be avoided at all costs.

The Don't List For Effective Communication:

1) Never yell, scold, or make fun of a person with dementia. On the other hand, do not spend your days walking on eggshells. Most people with dementia enjoy good-natured bantering, joking, and kidding around. If you offend someone in the process, sincerely apologize and refrain from doing it again, but the occasions when that is necessary are likely to be rare. People with dementia usually want to be treated as normally as possible, and laughing together is a terrific "normal" activity.

2) Never use elderspeak when talking to an older adult. Elderspeak is when you speak to the person as if you were speaking to a child. Terms of endearment such as "honey" or "sweetie" are forms of elderspeak. This also includes the inappropriate use of plural pronouns such as asking the person, "Are we ready for our bath?" This communication style is patronizing and demeaning. Furthermore, research has found that the use of elderspeak increases the chance that persons with dementia will resist care.

3) Never talk as if the individual is not there. Always include and involve the person in the conversation. For example, if Mrs. Smith asks about how Mr. Smith's day went, you might respond, "Well, Mr. Smith, how has your day been? You seemed to really enjoy planting the tomato plants this afternoon." Recognize the positive message you give a person by acknowledging them. It certainly lets the person know you've "seen" them and that he/she matters.

4) Do not ask the person with dementia "Do you remember...?" It is nearly impossible for a person with dementia to answer questions about recent events as these events were never recorded as memories in his/her brain. The person will often become tongue-tied when asked questions like, "What did you have for lunch?" This type of question stumps the person with dementia, and as a result, he/she may make up answers such as, "I didn't have lunch." Answering questions about past events may even be difficult as memory loss progresses.

5) Never argue with a person with dementia. It is a common saying among dementia experts that "You'll never win an argument with someone with dementia." You typically will not be able to reason with a person with dementia. Even if your argument is valid, he/she is unlikely to see the validity in your argument. This means you must choose your battles carefully and always be willing to take the blame for misunderstandings.

6) Don't over-explain. As dementia progresses, the person tends to speak less. Because of this, caregivers have a tendency to fill in those conversational gaps with detailed explanations. This can make the person feel more anxious and confused. However, the amount of acceptable conversation varies among individuals and is really an individual preference. For example, some people like having conversations during caregiving tasks because it distracts from their embarrassment at needing help with toileting or bathing. Other people with dementia need all of their powers of concentration to focus on the task. If you start to talk about the weather, they will forget they were trying to put on a shirt. The key is to recognize what an individual needs in any given situation. It is okay to be silent and silence is perfectly acceptable at times.

The primary goals behind learning how to communicate with your loved one with dementia effectively are to build a stronger relationship with that person and to provide a higher quality of care. By knowing how the condition progresses over time, you can better understand the typical challenges that arise. More important, however, is to know the individual- the unique person- who has dementia. People want to feel helpful and valued and that doesn't change with dementia. Ask the person about his/her experiences, ask the person for help, and ask for his/her advice. And please enjoy each other's sense of humor. Amazingly, smiling is something people with dementia can do until nearly the end of their lives, so find ways to foster smiles.

If you have specific questions that you would like answered in an upcoming issue of this e-newsletter please reach out to Monica Kuehl, RN, BSN, Director of Marketing @ m.kuehl@arborsprings.org or 515-223-1135 and I'll do my best to get to them all.