



## TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA

- 1. Set a good mood for interaction.** Attitude and body language will communicate your feelings and thoughts stronger than your words. Set a positive mood by speaking in a pleasant and respectful manner.
- 2. Get the person's attention.** Limit distractions and noise, turn off the radio or TV. Make sure you have his/her attention. Address by their name; identify yourself by name and relation. Use nonverbal cues and touch to help keep him/her focused. If your loved one is seated, get down to the same level and maintain eye contact.
- 3. State your message clearly.** Use simple words and sentences. Speak slowly, distinctly and in a reassuring tone. If you are not understood the first time, use the same wording to repeat your message or question.
- 4. Ask simple, answerable questions.** One question at a time; those with yes/no answers work the best. Refrain from asking open-ended questions or giving too many choices. For example, ask *"Would you like to wear your red shirt or blue shirt?"* Better still, show the choices – visual prompts and cues also help clarify your question.
- 5. Listen with your ears, eyes, and heart.** Be patient in waiting for your loved one's reply. If he/she is struggling for an answer, suggest words. Watch for nonverbal cues and body language, and respond appropriately.
- 6. Break down activities into a series of steps.** This makes tasks more manageable. Encourage your loved one to do what they can. Gently remind of steps that are easily forgotten, and assist with steps they're no longer able to accomplish on their own.
- 7. When the going gets tough, distract and redirect.** When your loved one becomes upset, change the subject or the environment. It is important to connect with the person on a feeling level, before you redirect. You might say, *"I see you're feeling sad – I'm sorry you're upset. Let's go get some fresh air."*
- 8. Respond with affection and reassurance.** People with dementia often get confused, anxious and may comment on things that never really occurred. Avoid trying to convince them they are wrong. Focus on the feelings they are demonstrating (which are real) and respond with verbal and physical expressions of comfort, support and reassurance. Sometimes holding hands, touching, hugging and praise will get the person to respond when all else fails.
- 9. Remember the good old days.** Many people with dementia may not remember what happened 45 minutes ago, but they can clearly recall their lives 45 years earlier. Avoid asking questions that rely on short-term memory, such as asking the person what they had for lunch. Instead, ask general questions about the person's distant past –this information is more likely to be retained.
- 10. Maintain your sense of humor.** Use humor whenever possible, though not at the person's expense. People with dementia tend to retain their social skills and are usually delighted to laugh along with you.