



Communication Strategies: Ways to Maximize Success When Communicating With Someone With Dementia

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Objectives

- To provide a brief overview of dementia and the prevalence rates across the globe.
- Discuss what communication is and how it changes for someone diagnosed with dementia.
- Provide a person-centred framework to enhancing communication for people with dementia.
- Explore several interventions for caregivers to use when they are caring for someone with dementia.

What is Dementia

- “**Dementia** is a syndrome – usually of a chronic or progressive nature – in which there is deterioration in cognitive function (i.e. the ability to process thought) beyond what might be expected from normal ageing. It affects memory, thinking, orientation, comprehension, calculation, learning capacity, language, and judgement.”

Types of Dementia

- There are several different types of dementia.
 - Alzheimer's Disease
 - Mixed Dementia
 - Lewy Body Dementia
 - Vascular Dementia
 - Frontotemporal Dementia
 - Alcohol-Related Dementia

Rates of Dementia World Wide

- 35.6 million people have some type of dementia.
- 7.7 million people are diagnosed with dementia very year.
- By 2030, 65.7 million people will have dementia.
- By 2050, 115.4 million people will have dementia.

Rates of Dementia in Canada

- In 2008, 480,618 people were living with dementia (1.5 % of the Canadian population).
- By 2038, this number will increase to 1.1 million people living in Canada with dementia (2.8% of the population).
- In 2008, in individuals 65 years and older, there were approximately 103,728 people/year newly diagnosed with dementia.
- By 2038, this number will increase by 2.5 times to 257 811 people/year (65 +) newly diagnosed with dementia.

-Rising Tide Report, Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2010

Communication

- When someone with dementia has significant cognitive changes, communication is affected.
- Deterioration in communication (which may be gradual or sudden) is a significant fact in many types of dementia.
- As a result, people with dementia need assistance to communicate.

Communication Difficulties

- Depending on the type and cause of dementia, communication difficulties may include:
 - Reduced vocabulary
 - Word-finding difficulty
 - Problems with reasoning
 - Repetition of thoughts
 - Lack of coherence
 - Losing track of topic
 - Distractibility

Communication Difficulties

- Other communication difficulties may include:
 - Writing and reading skills may deteriorate.
 - Losing the normal social conventions of a conversation (may interrupt, ignore another speaker, or not respond when spoken to).
 - Problems expressing emotions appropriately.

Behaviours as a Result of Communication Difficulties

- Behaviours may arise as a result of the individual with dementia not being able to communicate with people around them.
- For example, a resident with dementia in a long-term care home hits out at a staff member because they can't tell the person that they don't want to get dressed.
- These behaviours are often called “challenging”, “aggressive”, or “manipulative.”

Behaviours and Communication

- It is important for these “challenging behaviours” to be understood as a means of communication.
- The person with dementia is transmitting a message/need/problem via their behaviour that something is not right.

Responsive Behaviours

- We can reframe these behaviours as “responsive behaviours” (Talerico & Evans, 2000).
- When behaviours are reframed as responsive, it directs caregivers to search for the meaning of the behaviour and provide care in a way that is respectful and person-centred.

Why Communication is Important

- People with dementia who have communication difficulties may become isolated, neglected and excluded from social activities -Alzheimer Society, 2007 – Submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group Dementia Workforce Inquiry.
- When they are ignored or isolated, their needs, abilities and strengths are not acknowledged and supported (Young, 2012).
- This leads to a sense of helplessness and disempowerment (Young, 2012).
- As a result, the person with dementia does not want to engage which brings on more non-engagement with the caregiver (Ward, 2008).

Why Communication is Important

- Communication:
 - Is a vital aspect in our lives – we all need to communicate.
 - Allows us to express who we are and establish relationships with those around us.
 - Allows us to convey messages, thoughts, or emotions to others around us.
 - Is more than just talking and listening, it involves understanding and interpreting.

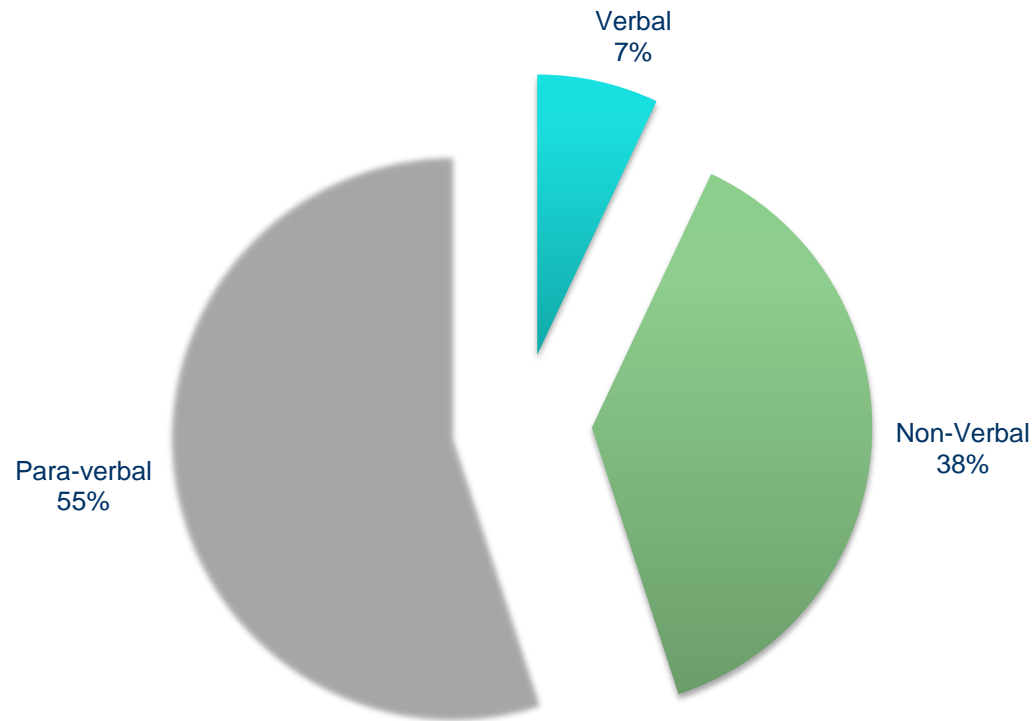
Communication and the Brain

- Communication:
 - Some residents who have difficulty communicating may understand everything that you say to them.
 - On the other hand, residents who are able to communicate verbally may not understand what you are saying.
 - Speech production and comprehension are in two different parts of the brain.

How We Communicate

- We communicate in three ways:
 - Verbally
 - The words we speak.
 - Non-verbally
 - Our body language (facial expression, posture and gesture).
 - Para-verbally
 - The tone, pacing and volume of our voice.

How We Communicate



-The Aged Care: Standards and Accreditation Agency (2004) Demystifying Dementia Care – Module 2: Communicating in Dementia Care

Importance of Non-Verbal Communication

Given that 93% of how we communicate is non-verbal, “...**communication is not so much about what you say, but how you say it.** When caring for a person who has dementia and who is having difficulty communicating this is especially true.”

— The Aged Care: Standards and Accreditation Agency (2004) Demystifying Dementia Care – Module 2: Communicating in Dementia Care

Person-Centred Care Approach to Communication

- Person-centred care values people with dementia as individuals with unique histories, values, likes, beliefs and strengths.
- Care includes a person's abilities, preferences, and choices.
- Providing person-centred care moves beyond the physical act of providing care and involves the whole person and their social, cultural and individual identity.

Person-centred Care Approach to Communication

- A successful person-centred care approach to communication includes:
 - Believing that communication is possible at any stage of dementia even when their condition is fairly advanced.
 - Focusing on the remaining skills and abilities of the person with dementia.
 - Reassuring the person with dementia and being positive.
 - Meeting people with dementia where they are and accepting their reality.

Person-centred Care Approach to Communication

- Believing communication is possible
 - Communication is possible at all stages of dementia.
 - What a person says, does and how they behave is a way to communicate and there is meaning behind these things.
 - Knowing the person you care for will help you interpret the meaning behind the behaviour.
 - No matter what the person does or says, treat them with respect and dignity.

Person-centred Care Approach to Communication

- Focusing on the person's abilities and skills
 - Although there are cognitive deficits with dementia, the person's emotions and feelings will remain.
 - Focusing on their remaining skills and abilities will increase their quality of life.
 - If speech is lost or you are having a difficult time understanding the person with dementia, consider using alternative ways to help them express themselves (i.e. through art, gardening, and touch).

Person-centred Care Approach to Communication

- Reassuring and being positive
 - Encourage the person when they are having trouble expressing themselves.
 - Move away from criticizing, correcting, ignoring and be supportive and positive.
 - Laughter and humour go a long way in diffusing a challenging situation.

Person-centred Care Approach to Communication

- Meeting the person where they are and accepting their reality
 - The reality of a person with dementia may be very different than our own reality.
 - Individuals with dementia are not able to enter our world, therefore, caregivers must enter into the world of the person with dementia.
 - Try to meet the person where they are.
 - Avoid confronting/convincing the person with dementia that what they are experiencing is untrue.

Person-centred Care Approach to Communication

- Meeting the person where they are and accepting their reality
 - Trying to bring them back into our reality (reality orientation) or disagreeing with the person with dementia will cause them to become even more confused or upset.
 - If the person says something that you know is untrue, try to find ways around the situation instead of reacting negatively. (-Alzheimer Society of Canada – Day to Day Series: Communication 2010).
 - Utilize Validation Therapy instead of Reality Orientation.

Validation Therapy

- Validation Therapy helps the caregiver understand the meaning behind the message from the person with dementia.
- The caregiver enters the person with dementia's world and validates their emotions/thoughts/feelings in whatever time or place that is real to that person.
- The caregiver listens to the emotional message behind the person's behaviour and validates how they are feeling.
- Redirection might be helpful.

Validation Therapy

- Points to remember with Validation Therapy:
 - Do not argue with a person if they are insisting something is true that you know is not.
 - Listen to the message and try to find the meaning behind what they are saying.
 - Allow the person with dementia to express themselves.

“Remember to Connect and not to Correct”

Verbal Redirection

- Redirection may also be used as a way to help communicate with a person with dementia.
- Redirection can be positive or negative.
- Negative redirection happens when you dismiss someone or ignore what they are trying to tell you.
 - For example, “You don’t need your purse” or “Don’t worry about it.”

Verbal Redirection

- Positive redirection validates and joins in on what a person is thinking and feeling.
- Successful redirection can be done in four steps:
 - **Validate** the person's reality, or what they are feeling or thinking.
 - **Join** the person where they are and listen to their point of view.
 - **Distract** the person by pointing their attention to something else.
 - **Redirect** them by engaging them in an enjoyable activity.

-Gentle Persuasive Approaches in Dementia Care: Responding to Persons with Challenging Behaviours 2010 Curriculum manual

Verbal Redirection

- An example of Redirection:
 - **Validating:** “You think that someone has taken your keys. I can understand why you are angry.”
 - **Joining:** “You need to look really hard for those keys? Well, I lost my book as well. Lets look together.”
 - **Distraction:** “Lets look for your keys by the piano.”
 - **Redirection:** “I love it when you play Amazing Grace. Could you play it for me?”

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- There are some very simple communication strategies that you can use when caring for individuals with dementia. They fall under the following areas:
 - Caring Approach
 - Talking clearly
 - Body Language
 - Setting up the right environment
 - Using the most appropriate words

—The Aged Care: Standards and Accreditation Agency (2004) Demystifying Dementia Care – Module 2: Communicating in Dementia Care

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Caring Approach

- People with dementia are very sensitive to how we look, act, the tone of our voice, our body position, etc.
- How we present will affect our relationship with the person that we are caring for.
- Using a friendly, calm, relaxed approach will put the individual at ease even if they do not understand what you are saying.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Other things to try with the Caring Approach includes:
 - Addressing the person by their preferred name
 - Avoid using generic terms like “love”, “dear”, “papa”
 - Be flexible
 - Do not argue
 - Remain calm – ask for help if you are frustrated
 - Be patient
 - Listen carefully and do not interrupt
 - Make communication a two way street
 - Encourage humour and laughter
 - Respect sadness

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Talking Clearly
 - Residents with dementia have difficulty in remembering and interpreting information. As the disease progresses, the ability to manage complex information declines.
 - To make communication successful, the message that you send needs to be short and simple.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Things to try when you are Talking Clearly include:
 - Use simple, short sentences.
 - Speak at an appropriate volume. Do not yell.
 - Give one direction/piece of information at a time.
 - Give enough time for the person with dementia to process information (10-20 seconds minimum).
 - Speak slowly and clearly – gage your pace by the reaction of the person with dementia.
 - Use words that the person with dementia understands, knows or is familiar with.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- The Right Environment
 - Often times, the person with dementia is over-stimulated in an environment that has “too much going on.”
 - For example:
 - Too many people talking at the same time.
 - Radio and the television playing in the background.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- To make the environment more conducive to enhancing communication the following tips may help:
 - Turning off the TV, Radio, CD Player.
 - Taking the person to a quiet area if you are not able to minimize the background noise to have a conversation.
 - Stay still while you are talking; the more the person can focus on you the better.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Body Language

- Given that people with dementia receive over 93% of their information about their world through non-verbal communication, it is important that care givers understand how strongly that these individuals rely on non-verbal communication to interpret the world around them.
- Caregivers need to be observant of the body language they present.
- You may be saying one thing, but body language could suggest another.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Body Language is always present. It can either be positive or negative. The following tips on body language may help enhance communication:
 - Ensure that the person with dementia realizes that you are there. Make eye contact before saying anything (where culturally appropriate).
 - Smile.
 - Do not stand directly over top of the person with dementia.
 - Bend down to their level so that they don't have to look up at you.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Other tips on Body Language include:
 - Use hand gestures and other visual cues to communicate.
 - Provide touch and contact (as appropriate).
 - Be aware of the personal space of the person you are caring for. They may not be comfortable with you in their “whisper zone.”
 - Try to avoid body language that conveys that you are frustrated, angry and in a hurry (even if you are!).
 - Examples include: sighing, shaking fists, rolling eyes.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Using the Appropriate Words
 - It is essential for the care giver to use words that the resident is able to understand.
 - Tips to increase success include:
 - Talk to the person as an adult.
 - Use words that the person knows.
 - Use close ended questions when trying to do tasks.
 - Use open ended questions when you want to open up conversation.
 - Watch for signs of frustration.
 - Use words that are positive, encouraging and reassuring.
 - Use visual cues and pictures if you are struggling to get a message across.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Other communication tips include:
 - Do not speak to the resident with your back turned or from a different room.
 - Ensure hearing aids are on or they have batteries in them.
 - Ensure that the person with dementia is wearing their glasses.
 - Always introduce what you are doing prior to completing a task.
 - Avoid literal phrases (i.e.. I am going to put the person in room 306 down) which may confuse the person with dementia.
 - Avoid using modern slang.

Communication Techniques for People with Dementia

- Other communication tips include:
 - Allow people from other cultures/backgrounds time to explain. Check with that person to be sure that you got the information correct. You can form it as a question. (i.e. Mr. Smith, do you want me to go and get your glasses?”).
 - Learn a few words in the languages of the people that you care for to not only connect with them, but to give them information about what you need them to do (i.e. learn the words bath and dinner in French).

Take Home Messages

- Communication is a vital part of who we are as human beings.
- People with dementia can communicate at every stage of their disease.
- Behaviour is a means of communication.
- Sometimes “responsive behaviours” occur as a result of communication difficulties.
- Communication is not so much about what you say, but how you say it.
- To enhance communication, a person-centred care approach is recommended.

Questions?

- Thank you!