



COMMUNICATION CONNECTIONS

Fall 2007

FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS WHO MAY NEED SUPPORT

Communicating Comfort

Fireside Chat Series: Spirituality & Dementia

“If we just worry about the big picture, we are powerless. So, my secret is to start right away doing whatever little work I can do. I try to give joy to one person in the morning and remove the suffering of one person in the afternoon. If you and your friends do not despise the small work a million people will remove a lot of suffering. That is the secret. Start right now.” Sister Chan Khong, social activist.

What is Dementia? What types of Dementia are there?

Dementia is a set of symptoms which include loss of memory, understanding and judgement. Dementia can be reversible (can get better) or irreversible (will not improve over time.) Some common types are: Alzheimer’s disease, Vascular Dementia, Frontal-Temporal Dementia, Lewy Body Disease or Mixed Dementia.

What does it mean to communicate comfort?

Maybe comfort to you is a cozy sweater, the morning paper or a warm cup of coffee. What is comfort to a person who suffers from Dementia? Comfort comes in many forms and can be spiritual, physical, social or psychological. Here are some tips from others to help with those difficult times when the loved one or person you are caring for can no longer communicate as before:

T. I. P. S. (Things I Plan to Start doing) These are real life examples from caregivers:

****We know it takes time to start a new behavior or change an old one--two weeks is the “rule of thumb.” Keep visiting and smiling with those persons with Dementia and in just 12 days he/she will smile back at you!**

****Offer someone a ride to church this week--a car ride or a wheel chair ride!**

****Hold hands with a person who has Dementia.**

****Dementia persons can communicate with their eyes or a nod of the head to mean yes or no.**

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**Music may be a life-long joy to Dementia persons and they may sing even when they no longer speak or communicate in their usual manner. Singing is often joyful to these persons.

**TAKE TIME--take time just to walk in the garden, look at familiar photos or to allow Dementia persons to hold things in their hand that were at one time meaningful to them

**Remember tears don't always mean sadness, they can mean joy or happiness!

**You don't have to be a pastor or a minister to communicate spirituality to a loved one or person with Dementia.

**DON'T ASK TOO MANY QUESTIONS!! (Especially those that require a complex answer.) Try to ask questions that require only a "yes" or "no" answer or a nod of the head.

**Remember that changes in behavior may come with deterioration of the condition of a Dementia person or from a change in their medication regime.

**Some calming activities may create communicating comfort opportunities or time for talking together. Examples might be a shave, a back rub, a haircut, holding a puppy or a peaceful walk together.

**Dementia persons or loved ones may be able to focus better if they have used the bathroom, or had a drink or a small meal, so they can concentrate on what event you are doing with them, such as a walk or listening to a spiritual service.

**Remember spirituality does not mean religion. Spirituality is "the very soul of our existence" (Fireside Chat, October 26th, 2007, Anonymous.)

**Learn some things outside of your own faith and or culture to help those persons who may not share the same religion or spirituality view as the caregiver does.

**One last bit of support in caring for Dementia loved ones or persons is to remember things that might have been comforting to them before their illness struck may not be soothing to them now. Try things with them, but don't get discouraged when they become agitated. Try for a short time or try a couple of times and then try something different from the suggested tips above.

"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing in the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment." Lady Dorothy Neville.

Stay tuned for the next "Communication Connection" Winter 2007, "Meaningful Engagement."

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