

Communication 1 stage

Closely related words are substituted for forgotten words. When you can't make out what a person with Alzheimer's Disease needs, point to the objects in question while asking questions like: "Do you want your purse? Your comb?" The person will have trouble understanding and following directions. Keep your sentences short and your directions clear. "Mother, fold the scarf." "Put the scarf in the drawer." "Close the drawer."

Tips and Techniques

1. Discuss important business during the morning when everyone is fresh;
2. Focus on one topic at a time;
3. Use specific words, names of people and objects;
4. Do not use pronouns or general language;
5. Words or events may be forgotten. Don't take it personally if birthdays or other special events are forgotten.

Communication 2 stage

At this stage, recall and word recognition decrease and attention span is shortened. A person with Alzheimer's Disease may change the subject often. You may need to repeat the same question or sentence many times and in different ways before it's understood.

Tips and Techniques

1. Give stimulation that can be sensed emotionally, like music and touch;
2. Present objects with the quality of moderate novelty. Things that are familiar enough so that they do not frighten or confuse, but unusual enough so that they interest;
3. Give touch in a systematic way. Stimulate the person's forehead, cheeks, ears, neck, shoulders, back, forearms, hands, feet and lower legs through small circular stroking movements. Use skin lotion to protect the skin;
4. Stimulate smell with bread, wood, soft soap, fur, camphor, yarn, etc.;
5. Comb the person's hair and give him or her the opportunity to look in the mirror;
6. Stimulate taste buds;
7. Elicit listening behavior and maintain attention by touching;
8. If the person speaks only in single words, then you should speak in single words. However, note that the person may be able to understand better than he/she can talk;

Communication Tips, late stage:

Toward the end, a person with Alzheimer's Disease loses almost all ability to communicate or understand. Both long- and short-term memory are severely impaired, and he or she is totally dependent on the caregiver.

1. Continue speaking warmly, quietly and with eye contact;
2. Pat or stroke the person. Touch with love;
3. Smile. After all else is lost, a smile can calm and bring joy.

Problem Behaviours

The person may scream or yell inappropriately and may resist a caregiver's attempts to help with bathing, dressing or other personal care. Some physicians will prescribe anti-psychotic or calming medications.

Guidelines for Dealing With Behaviour Problems

- Everything surrounding a person could contribute to the behaviour problem;
- A thorough assessment of the elder, the environment and the caregiver by a trained professional is necessary in order to plan for intervention;
- Think ahead and plan for situations that could result in problem behaviours;
- Trying to argue or reason with a person who has Alzheimer's Disease only results in frustration for both the caregiver and the elder. It is not possible to win an argument with a person who has Alzheimer's Disease;
- Distract and divert whenever possible;
- Keep the routine the same. Changes in routine are upsetting to people with Alzheimer's Disease and can cause behaviour problems;
- Promote a sense of security and comfort when problem behaviours occur. Problem behaviours often happen because a person is frightened and unable to make sense out of the environment;
- Use positive reinforcement such as food, smiles, a gentle touch, personal attention and lots of praise. These tools are more effective than negative reactions;
- Allow a person with Alzheimer's Disease some sense of control. Being able to save face is important even in a person who is very confused;
- Maintain a calm manner when confronted with threatening behaviours. This can defuse a very tense situation and help a person become less fearful;
- Keep things simple. Complex situations only cause frustration and can escalate behaviour problems;
- If a caregiver becomes frustrated and angry, it is best to find someone else to handle the problem and have the caregiver leave the immediate area or take a break (respite). An angry caregiver will only intensify problem behaviours;
- Caregivers should practice ways to reduce stress when they become frustrated and angry. Deep breathing or talking to someone can be helpful. Remember that stress comes from many sources, including personal life;
- Behavioural problems result from the disease. Don't take things that the person says and does personally. It is the disease speaking;
- Be creative when seeking solutions to difficult behaviours;
- Use good common sense when attempting to solve problem behaviours;
- Keep a sense of humour even in the most difficult situations. Humour will help you cope with the frustrations of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease.