



Tip Sheet:

How to communicate with a person living with DEMENTIA

Being aware of how you talk, listen and behave will help you to have positive interactions with someone living with dementia.

Things to know

- Not everyone experiences the same dementia symptoms or behaviours.
- Try different communication methods. Some may work well for one person but not another; some may work well one day but not the next.
- Some people may have challenges being understood or may have difficulty understanding things they hear or read.



Start with a positive interaction

- Place yourself in front of the person, be at the same level, make eye contact, and stay still to ensure they can focus on you.
- Reduce distractions. Bring the person to a quieter place if possible. It can be reassuring and help them understand you better.
- Stay calm and be patient.
- Avoid body language that makes you seem annoyed, like sighing or crossing your arms. People living with dementia may be sensitive to nonverbal cues.
- Pay attention to behaviour and body language. This can show you a lot about how they are feeling.
- Respect their personal space.

Listen attentively

- Give them time to respond and express themselves.
- Offer non-verbal encouragement, like making eye contact and nodding.
- Validate what they have said to let them know you are listening. Use phrases like, “Yes, this does seem like a long wait.”
- Try not to interrupt when they are speaking, even if you think you know what they want to say.

Speak with care

- Speak slowly and clearly and use a friendly tone.
- Use short and simple sentences.
- Avoid open-ended questions and too many options. Focus on one response at a time.
- Avoid using childish or patronizing language.
- Avoid telling them they’re wrong or that you just told them something, as this may confuse them. Instead, respond calmly and offer encouragement—sometimes all you need to do is listen and reassure them.
- Try to communicate in different ways if they seem confused. You can:
 - use hand gestures, like pointing
 - offer to show them what you mean
 - write out clear directions with large print and photos if possible
- If someone is having difficulty finding the right word and appears to want help, you can suggest the word or ask them to describe or point to it.

For more information, visit: canada.ca/dementia