



# Communication & Dementia

Dementia affects every individual differently and uniquely. It is important to use a way of communicating that is right for each person and be willing to adapt to new ways of communicating with different people. As the dementia progresses you may also find that you have to consider different forms of communication that better works for that person throughout the different stages of their life.

No matter what form of communication you use, one thing that should remain consistent is your ability to listen carefully and understand the needs and wants of the person you are caring for. It's always good to remember that non-verbal communication can be very meaningful to the individual and can be just as effective as spoken words.

## **Before you communicate - think of your surroundings**

- Make sure the individual is comfortable, ensure a quiet and calm environment with good lighting. A busy environment can often cause the person the inability to concentrate, so it would be wise to turn off the tv or radio, and remove any other distractions before you attempt to communicate.
- Utilise the good days, and best times of day to communicate more effectively with important information. These times are often the best to understand the person's feelings and wishes.

## **Listening Effectively**

- Offer encouragement to the person using both verbal and non-verbal communication, make eye contact and give the person time to express their words.
- Pay close attention to their body language, often their body language and face features can tell us more than the words they are saying.
- If you don't understand what they are trying to communicate, ask them to repeat what they said, repeat back to them what you think they are trying to say to gain clarification and if you are still struggling, or they are struggling to find the word, instead ask them to describe the object or scenario

## **How to Communicate effectively**

- Always talk calmly and clearly, using short and simple sentences. It's been proven that using more conversational talk rather than a series of questions is more effective and less intimidating to the individual.
- Always include the person in conversations with others, being included can help them to keep their sense of identity and know they are valued. It can also help them to feel less excluded or isolated.
- Keep conversations short and simple, especially if the person tires easily.

## **If the person has difficulty understanding what you are saying**

- Try explaining it in a slightly different way, but also keeping it short and sweet.
- If possible, use visual aids like pictures of what you are trying to communicate.
- Keep the conversation light and don't show frustrations as this can often lead to the person themselves getting frustrated. Where possible try to laugh together about the misunderstandings, humour can often relieve tension and bring you closer to the person.