

Learning to Speak the Language of Dementia

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General communication strategies for persons with dementia

- Calm
- Flexible
- Non-resistive
- Guiding, not controlling
- Simplify
- Go slow
- Give message in more than one modality
- Eliminate background noise and distractions
- Include the person
- Treat as peer or elder, not child

Verbal Approaches

- Address them by their preferred name
- Use concrete, exact, positive phrases
- Use short, simple sentences
- Give one step commands
- Make suggestions
- Ask “yes/no” questions
- Use props, word cues
- Use distraction
- Avoid arguing and reasoning
- Use encouraging, nondirective language
- Identify the person’s vocabulary and use it
- Ask for their opinion
- Give compliments

Nonverbal Approaches

- Know attitude and mood are contagious
- Approach from front or side
- Make eye contact
- Get low
- Respect space
- Practice looking friendly
- Make verbal and nonverbal message the same
- Use gestures
- Use touch to guide, redirect, prompt behavior