

effective communication strategies



tips for program participants

This program is the property of the Alzheimer's Association and its contents may be used only by its authorized training staff and licensed representatives of the Association for presentations of "*Effective Communication Strategies*." It may not be reproduced or used for any other purpose without the prior written consent of the Alzheimer's Association. © 2014 Alzheimer's Association. All rights reserved.

table of contents

Introduction	page 5
Early stage	page 6
Middle stage	page 7
Late stage	page 10
Communication in all stages of the disease	page 13

communication effective strategies

introduction

Thank you for participating in the Alzheimer's Association's *Effective Communication Strategies* program. This booklet is designed to accompany the program and to provide you with a reference to take with you and use in the future.

The program and this Tips booklet are organized by stage. In each section, you will find a list of changes you may notice, followed by ideas for how to connect with the person in that stage. There is also space for notes.

We hope that you find this booklet helpful as you accompany the person with dementia through the stages, allowing you to communicate and connect with each other more effectively and meaningfully.

Early Stage

Changes you may notice include:

- Difficulty finding the right words.
- Taking longer to speak or respond.
- Withdrawing from conversations.
- Struggling with decision-making or problem-solving.

To connect:

- Ask directly how to help with communication.
- Keep sentences clear and straightforward.
- Leave plenty of time for conversations.
- Include the person in conversations that affect him or her, including planning for the future.

NOTES

Middle Stage

Changes you may notice include:

- Increased difficulty finding the right words.
- Using familiar words repeatedly.
- Inventing new words to describe familiar things.
- Easily losing train of thought.
- Speaking less frequently.

Consult a doctor when you notice major or sudden changes.

To connect, approach the person gently.

- Approach from the front, say who you are and call the person by name.
- Maintain eye contact and get at eye level if seated or reclining.
- Avoid criticizing, correcting and arguing.
- Pay attention to your tone.
- Take your time.

To connect, join the person's reality.

Keep respect and empathy in your mind, then:

- Assess the person's needs.
- Let the person know you hear him or her.
- Provide a brief answer.
- Respond to the emotions behind the statement.

Middle Stage

To connect, keep it slow and simple.

- Use short sentences and simple words.
- Speak slowly and clearly, one person and one question at a time.
- Limit distractions.
- Keep it simple and be patient.
- Offer a guess or fill in words if acceptable.

To connect, give multiple cues.

- Provide visual cues and gestures.
- Avoid sudden movement.
- Write things down for the person.
- Put answers into your questions.
- Repeat as needed.
- Turn negatives into positives.
- Avoid quizzing.

To connect, respond empathically and reassure.

- Join the person's reality.
- Provide reassurance that you hear and understand.
- Focus on the feelings, not the facts.
- Validate and redirect the person if necessary.

Late Stage

Changes you may notice include:

- Communication is reduced to a few simple words or sounds.
- Possible responses to familiar words or phrases.

To connect:

- Listen for expressions of pain and respond promptly.
- Help the person feel safe and happy.
- Continue to bring respect to each conversation.
- Keep talking.
- Use all five senses to communicate.

Connect through touch.

- Feel different fabrics.
- Identify shapes by touch.
- Give lotion hand massages.
- Identify everyday items in a bag by touch.
- Visit with animals.
- Finger paint or sculpt using non-toxic materials.

Connect through sight.

- Laminate brightly colored pictures to look at together.
- Watch videos of baby animals, nature or travel.
- Look at photo albums together.
- View photos of famous paintings, favorite settings or prominent people from the past.
- Go bird watching or visit an aquarium.
- Paint with watercolors.
- Go outdoors or sit by an open window together.

Connect through sound.

- Listen to familiar music.
- Listen to recordings of the sounds of nature, farms, cities, animals or babies.
- Identify musical instruments by sound.
- Listen to songs or speech in the person's native language.
- Let the person hear the gentle tone of your voice.

Connect through smell.

- Make small plastic bags containing items for the person to smell, such as:
 - Herbs, spices, teas or coffee beans.
 - Cotton balls dipped in essential oils.
 - Grass clippings, fragrant flowers.
- Use fragrant lotions for hand massages.

Communication in all stages of the disease

In every stage, keep the following communication tips in mind.

- To connect, join the person's reality.
- Understand and accept what you can and cannot change.
- Demonstrate respect and connect through feelings.
- Try to decode the person's communications.
- Recognize the effects of your mood and actions.
- Try to understand the source of reactions.
- Help identify and meet the person's needs while soothing and calming him or her.

NOTES
