

effective communication strategies



Program goals

communication
effective strategies

By the end of today's program, you will be able to:

- Explain the communication changes that take place throughout the course of the disease.
- Decode the verbal and behavioral messages delivered by someone with dementia and respond in ways that are helpful to the person.
- Identify strategies to connect and communicate at each stage of the disease.

What is communication?

communication
effective strategies



Communication changes throughout the disease

Early stage (Mild)

- Convey thoughts and feelings through language.
- Able to make decisions about future care.
- May misinterpret what others say.

Middle stage (Moderate)

- Use basic words and sentences.
- Rely more on tone of voice, facial expression and body language.
- Continue to need emotional connection and meaningful activity

Late stage (Severe)

- May still respond to familiar words, phrases or songs.
- Use body language and the five senses to connect.

4

alzheimer's association

Communication in the 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.

5

alzheimer's association



Martha Tierney, LCSW, is Associate Director of Research Volunteer Programs for the National Office of the Alzheimer's Association.

6

alzheimer's association

Communication in the early stage

To connect:

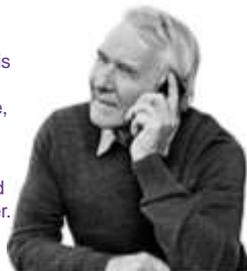
- Ask directly how to help with communication.
- Keep sentences clear and straightforward.
- Leave plenty of time for conversations.
- Include the person in conversations that affect him or her, including planning for the future.



Communication in the early stage

Keep in mind:

- Avoid making assumptions.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Communicate in the way that is most comfortable for the person. Options include phone, email, and in person.
- Laugh together.
- Be honest, laugh together, and stay connected with each other.



Communication in the 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.
- Communicating through behavior rather than words more often.

Consult a doctor when you notice major or sudden changes.



Beverly is a caregiver support group facilitator whose husband has Alzheimer's disease.

alzheimer's association

Communication in the middle stage

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.



alzheimer's association



Rebecca's mother had Alzheimer's disease.

alzheimer's association

Communication in the middle stage

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 his or her concerns, whether they are expressed through words, behavior or both.
- Provide a brief answer.
- Respond to the emotions behind the statement.

13

Communication in the middle stage

To connect, keep it slow and basic

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

14

Communication in the middle stage

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.



15

Communication in the middle stage

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.

16

Communication in the late stage

Changes you may notice include:

- Communication is reduced to a few 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.

17



Sandra's mother is in the late stage of Alzheimer's disease.

18

Communication in the late stage

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.
- Sculpt using non-toxic materials.
- Hold the person's hand or stroke his or her arm or back.



19

alzheimer's association

Communication in the late stage

Connect through sight

- Laminate brightly colored pictures to look at together.
- Watch videos of 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.

20

alzheimer's association

Communication in the late stage

Connect through sound

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

21

alzheimer's association

Communication in the late stage

Connect through smell

- Make small plastic bags containing items for the person to smell, such as:
 - Herbs or spices.
 - Cotton balls dipped in essential oils.
 - Grass clippings or fragrant flowers.
 - Teas or coffee beans.
- Use fragrant lotions for hand massages
- Cook or feed the person foods that smell good, such as apple pie or chicken soup.

22

alzheimer's association

Communication in the late stage

Connect through taste

- Favorite foods.
- Home-baked goodies.
- Popsicles.
- Flavored drinks.
- Ice creams and puddings.



23

alzheimer's association

Communication in all stages of the disease

- Join the person's reality to connect.
- Understand and accept what you can and cannot change.
- Remember that the person retains a sense of self despite the losses of the disease.
- Demonstrate respect and connect through feelings.
- Always treat the person as the adult he or she is.
- Try to decode the person's communications.
- Recognize the effects of your mood and actions.
- Try to understand the source of reactions.
- Help meet the needs while soothing and calming the person.

24

alzheimer's association



Sam Fazio, Ph.D., is the Director of Special Projects for the National Office of the Alzheimer's Association.

25

alzheimer's association

Contact us – we can help

communication effective strategies

alz.org

- Alzheimer's Navigator
- Community Resource Finder
- ALZConnected
- Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregiver Center
- Safety Center

800.272.3900

- 24/7 Helpline – Available all day every day

alz.org/findus

- Support groups, education programs and more available in communities nationwide

training.alz.org

- Free online education programs available at training.alz.org

26

alzheimer's association

Get involved

communication effective strategies

WALK TO END ALZHEIMER'S

volunteer

THE LONGEST DAY

advocate

alzheimer's association

trialmatch

27

alzheimer's association

Questions?

Alzheimer's Association

We're here. All day, every day.

24/7 Helpline: 800.272.3900

alz.org®

alzheimer's association

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 "Conversations About Dementia." It may not be reproduced or used for any other purpose without the prior written consent of Alzheimer's Association. © 2013 Alzheimer's Association. All rights reserved.
All photos contained in this program are being used for illustrative purposes only; any person depicted therein is a model.
