

CARE Compass

Helping Navigate the Later Stages of Dementia



Types of Communication

This project was made possible by a generous gift.

The goal of the program is to help provide tools and information so that you can navigate the later stages of dementia. We hope that you find these videos and resources to be helpful and encouraging.

This program is designed to be a guide only for the compassionate care and support of your loved one and is not medical advice. If you have questions or concerns, always check with your doctor.

We also want to acknowledge that late-stage dementia can look very different from person to person. Sometimes the ideas we share may not work or work for a short time. That is okay. No one person is alike, and what works today may not work tomorrow. We hope to provide tools that can be options for you to try.

This guide contains links and other resources that may not be provided by the presenter but are added to the guide to provide additional information and support.

Connecting and Communication

As dementia progresses, communication changes can increase, causing frustration, isolation, and difficulty connecting with others.

Transactional Communication, also referred to as Informational Communication, is a type of communication transaction that is used to convey facts, information, or instructions accurately.

- Purpose: Exchange information and complete tasks
- Focus on clarity and accuracy
- Used for: giving instructions, sharing facts, managing schedules and meeting practical needs

Examples:

“We are having chicken for dinner.”

Your appointment is at 12:30pm.”

“It is time to take your education.”

Care Task Tip: Remember, it takes two to tango. If your loved one is agitated or upset when you provide informational communication, leave the room, take a minute, and come back. Begin the conversation with connection, then proceed to transactional communication.

Interactional Communication more than exchanging information or completing tasks. The focus is on connecting in the moment to strengthen the relationship.

- Purpose: Build relationships and share experiences
- Focus on connection not accuracy, words do not have to be correct
- Used for: maintaining emotional bonds, a sense of belonging, and active engagement

Examples:

Watching birds together

Holding hands in silence

Reminiscing together with a photo book

Care Task Tip: It is important to have interactions with your loved one that is not focused solely on tasks or those that do not require exact words or responses.

Setting the Stage for Better Communication

Be an active listener:

- Sit face to face with your loved one
- Be fully present with them
- Think about your facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language

Care task tip: We are instinctively reactive to a smile by mirroring the smile back. Our natural reflex is to mimic what we see the other person doing.¹

Support Understanding:

- Focus on the general meaning or “gist” of the message
- Allow extra time for your loved one to process information and formulate a response
- Avoid rushing conversations

Care Task Tip: Use multiple communication methods. Written words, pictures, gestures, and objects.

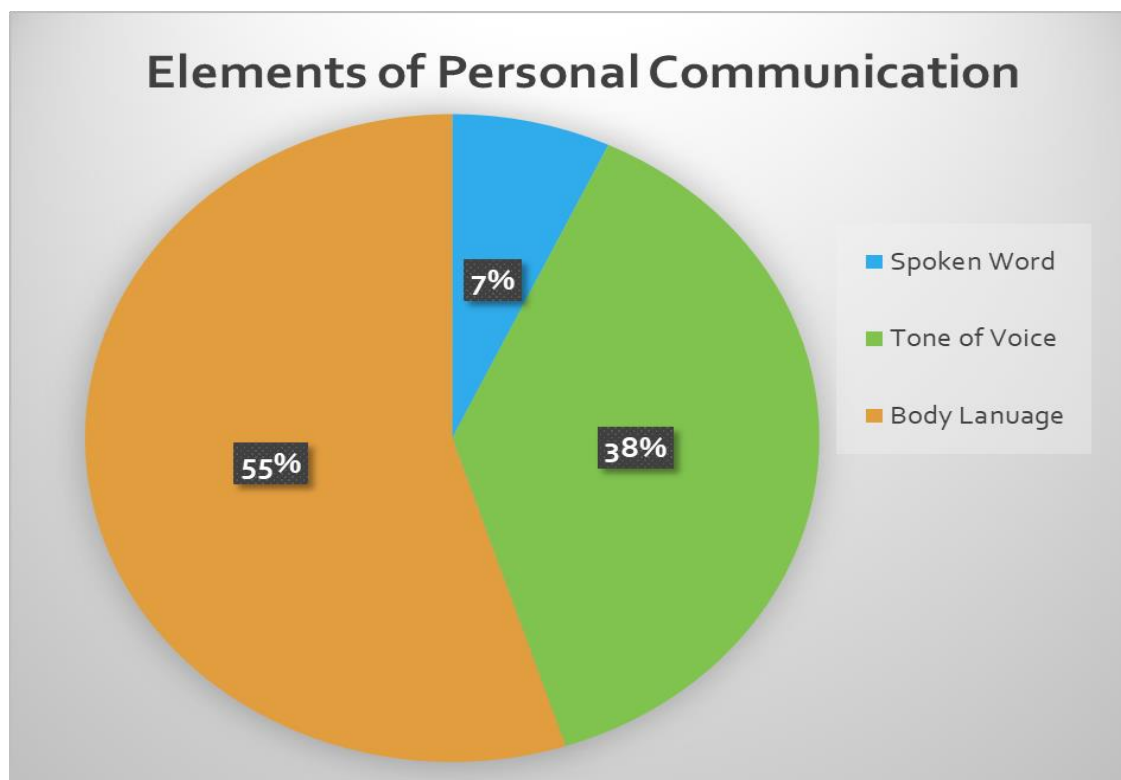
Connection through Everyday Activities

Household tasks- folding towels, drying dishes, stirring ingredients, adding premeasured ingredients, sitting at the kitchen table or bedroom chair as you prepare a meal or make a bed.

Hobbies- flower arrangements, coloring simple pictures, sorting objects (cards, dominos, writing utensils), listening to music, and visiting with a pet

Exercise- walks, dancing, gentle stretching, seated exercises, or hand massage

Care Task Tip: When the activity doesn't work, stop or change the task if your loved one becomes frustrated or has lost interest. Focus on enjoyment and connection.



Ranjan, P., Kumari, A., & Chakrawarty, A. (2015).
How can doctors improve their communication skills?

Communication breakdowns happen; it is okay. Below are strategies to recover from feeling overwhelmed or frustrated.

Take a moment to breathe, try to ground yourself before responding. Stay calm and try to maintain a friendly tone of voice.

Try to repeat the information differently.

As you are standing and they are seated, instead of saying, “Here take your pills.”

Try: Sitting down with them at the table, smiling and making small talk briefly, then asking them to complete the task. “The weather is going to be gorgeous today, let’s take our medication.” If you can mirror the task, this can help your loved one with nonverbal cues of what to do.

Websites With More Information:

The link below should route you to the Alzheimer's Association website discussing communication and Late-Stage Alzheimer's disease

<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/communications#late>

Alzheimer's Society website reviewing communication and dementia including non-verbal communication.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/stages-and-symptoms/dementia-symptoms/communicating-and-dementia>

TIPS:

- ❖ Join the person in their reality
- ❖ Repeat instructions the exact same way
- ❖ Don't reason or argue
- ❖ Don't remind them they forgot or ask them multiple questions about the past

(1) Wild, B., Erb, M., Eyb, M., Bartels, M., & Grodd, W. (2003). Why are smiles contagious? An FMRI study of the interaction between perception of facial affect and facial movements. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, 123(1), 17–36. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0925-4927\(03\)00006-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0925-4927(03)00006-4)