

The **Dementia Training** & *Education Strategy for Gloucestershire*

Top Tips for Positive Communication

- Ensure the person can fully see you as you approach
- Say the person's name and/or lightly touch their hand
- Wait until you have eye contact before you start speaking: move to the person's level
- Turn off background noise and if it is possible move away from distractions
- Think: does the person need their glasses or hearing aid?
- Speak in a calm and relaxed way
- Use short sentences
- Use everyday objects and pictures to help the person understand
- Allow the person time to respond
- Show you are listening and keep the person included
- Accept how the person is feeling. Don't argue about facts

Links:

Health & Social Care Common Induction Standards: **STANDARD 3.**

Health & Social Care QCF Units: **DEM 205; DEM 210; DEM 308; DEM 312**

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Top tips for Positive Communication

This information has been designed for use with people with dementia but is also applicable to people who have a variety of other difficulties relating to communication.

When a person has difficulty understanding or communicating their thoughts and ideas, there are many things we can do to help make it a little easier and less confusing for them. Here are some general strategies which may aid communication on a daily basis. They involve thinking about hearing, vision, the environment and changing the way you speak.

Ensure the person can fully see you as you approach

This gives the person time to understand what is happening and to see and hear you more clearly. Facial expression adds meaning to words and it is hard to lip-read people whose mouths are hidden or partially hidden by moustaches, beards or hands. Avoid eating, drinking or smoking while talking. Remove sunglasses - they stop people seeing your eyes, which give a lot of information.

Think about the angle that you might use to approach a person. Approaching 'head on' could cause a feeling of being confronted. It might be more useful to approach from an oblique angle.

Say the person's name and/or lightly touch their hand.

This will help the person to feel safe – and help you to gain their attention. If you do not effectively **gain** and maintain **someone's attention**, you are not likely to help them receive, understand, and remember what you are saying. People need to know that you are communicating with them: it is hard to make sense of a conversation when you have missed the first part of it. Methods of gaining someone's attention could be:

- saying their name - people are more likely to hear their name than other words! Say their name at the start of a sentence, not the end.
- gently tap the side of the chair or wheelchair in which they are sitting
- if you really must touch someone to attract their attention, gently tap the area between their shoulder and elbow. This is a 'neutral' area and does not usually cause offence.

Wait until you have eye contact before you start speaking: move to the person's level.

Wait until you have eye contact before you start talking. Saying the person's name or lightly touching their hand can help you to get eye contact. If you are unable to gain eye contact, make use of non-verbal approaches to provide reassurance, such as touch. Do not assume that they are not listening and keep them involved in any conversation.

Avoid standing over the person when you are talking. This can be intimidating, and can make it difficult for the person to see important things like your facial expression and your body language. Being at the same level allows you to be seen and heard more clearly.

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Turn off background noises such as the radio or TV and if it possible move away from distractions.

This will make conversations much easier. Also avoid overloading the person – don't talk or ask questions while they are concentrating on "doing". Don't talk or ask questions if you have your head turned away from the person.

Think: does the person need their glasses or hearing aid?

If the person usually wears a hearing aid and/or glasses, they may need to be reminded to wear them. Ensure glasses and hearing aids are clean and working properly – the person may need help and guidance with this.

Position yourself with light on your face - standing in front of a lamp or window will cast shadows across your face. If this happens, supporting visual cues will be lost.

Speak in a calm and relaxed way

Allow the person time, particularly if they have been asleep, to orientate themselves to where they are and what is happening before providing any verbal information. Give time for the person to think about, and respond to each short sentence. Try not to shout as this distorts words and makes them harder to understand. Don't speed up or slow down - speak at a normal rate. Try not to exaggerate your mouth movements when speaking as this also distorts the way words 'look'.

Use short sentences

Use short, simple sentences and emphasise the key words. Try not to use too many words at once. Give time for each chunk of information to get through and be prepared to repeat things as many times as the person needs you to.

Use everyday objects and pictures to help the person understand

Point to the objects and name them when you mention them e.g. if offering a coffee or tea, show the person the coffee jar or tea pot and name it. Set the scene with words and pictures/photos: if you are going to talk in detail about something, give an introductory sentence e.g. *"I want to talk to you about Jane"*.

Allow the person time to respond

You may need to take the lead in starting conversations so be prepared for this - have photos or other items with you that you can use to stimulate conversation.

Show you are listening and keep the person included

Give nonverbal feedback. While the speaker is speaking, be sure to smile, nod, frown, shrug your shoulders, or raise your eyebrows – whatever is appropriate.

Accept how the person is feeling. Don't argue about facts

Correcting a person is unlikely to help. Use non-committal responses for example "Oh really" or responses that acknowledge feelings such as "I am sorry you are upset". These can help the person to feel comfortable and also help to keep the communication with you more positive.

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