

Interacting with people who have dementia

The T.A.L.K. Protocol

Take it slow.

- Approach the person slowly and from the front.
- Speak slowly and in a calm, low voice.

Why it works: A person with dementia may experience things as happening faster than they are. What you think is a normal speed can seem like an attack. When you take it slow and approach from the front, the person may see you coming and is less likely to be surprised. Talking slowly and calmly also gives the person a better chance of understanding you and can make the person feel less anxious.

Ask simple questions.

- Avoid multipart questions.
- Be patient waiting for answers.
- Avoid the instinct to rephrase a question and ask again; rather pose a question the exact same way you did the first time.

Why it works: Because a person with dementia has trouble processing information, simple yes/no or one-word questions have a greater chance of being answered. Even these can take time for the person to answer. If you do ask a question again, even changing one word can cause the person with dementia to begin processing all over again.

Limit reality checks.

- Avoid correcting the person.
- Redirect as necessary. Try making a connection to another event, relative, or place and time.

Why it works: A person with dementia may, in his or her mind, return to an earlier time in life and may truly believe he or she is right. While you may see this as an opportunity to correct the person, that can cause distrust. You may instead be able to offer information about a specific event, relative, or place and time to help trigger a memory and move the conversation forward.

Keep eye contact.

- Use nonverbal communication.

Why it works: A person with dementia will tend to react strongly to body language. He or she may feel more comfortable if you establish a positive rapport using eye contact, nods of approval and a friendly posture.

For more information about the T.A.L.K. protocol, please contact the Alzheimer's Association www.alz.org