



*Caring
for our
Community*

Practical Tips for Conversation and Social Events

Dementia Advisory and Support Services

Not-for-Profit Health & Human Services

Changes happen to the way people communicate when they have dementia, which can then impact on our response in conversation with them.

These changes can be one of the most frustrating and difficult problems for people with dementia, their families and carers.

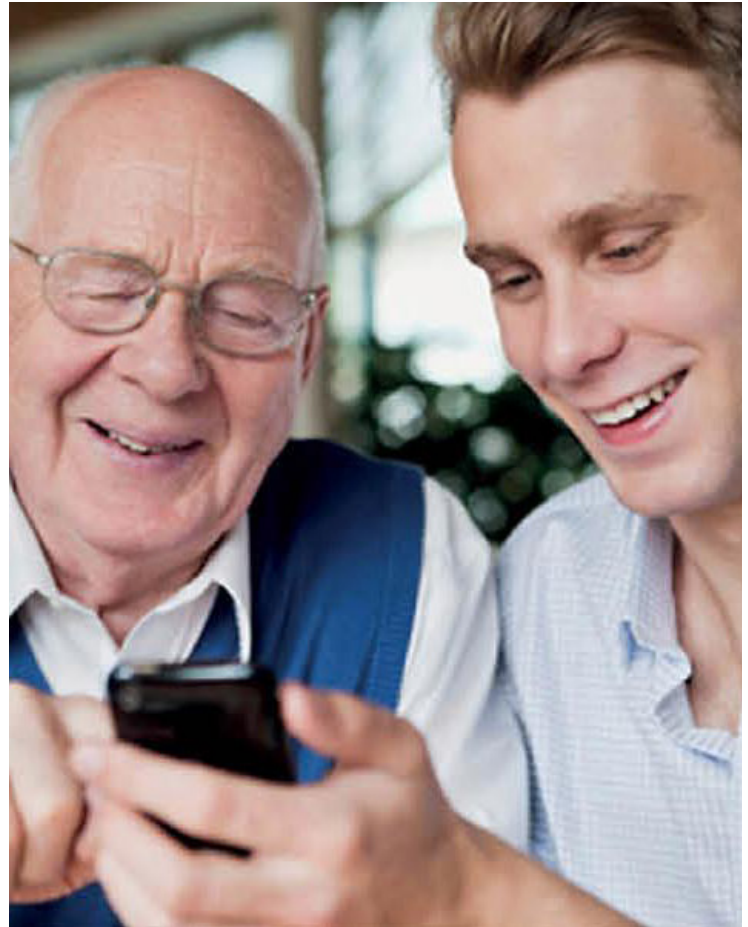
The person may find it more difficult to express themselves clearly and to understand what others say. However, social interaction remains important for everyone!

The photos included can assist you in your conversations.



Before you start a conversation, give some thought to the person's physical needs:

- Is the person too hot or too cold?
- Is the person thirsty or hungry?
- Does the person have pain?
- Does the person need to go to the bathroom?
- Is the person tired?
- Being uncomfortable can affect the person's ability to concentrate.



Tips to Promote Good Conversations

Check the environment:

- Ensure a quiet environment free from loud background noises such as the radio or TV.
- Ensure the person is wearing their glasses and hearing aids and there is enough light.



Try to get the person's attention:

- Make sure you have good eye contact or use gentle touch, if appropriate.
- Use the person's name and introduce yourself every time you meet, as the person may have forgotten who you are.
- Use name tags with large print as this may help the person recall names of family and friends.
- Try not to ask questions that rely on a good memory.



Be aware of your body language and tone of voice:

- Don't shout and try not to get angry.
- Focus on the feelings, not the facts.
- Always approach the person from the front and use their name when talking to them. Involve them in your discussion.



Keep it Simple:

- Use warm facial expressions.
- Use short sentences.
- Speak slowly and remember you are speaking to an adult.
- Be prepared to avoid using logic and reason at great length, as this might cause further confusion.



Take your Time:

- Give the person time to think and be careful not to interrupt.
- Allow extra time for the person to respond. If the person doesn't respond, wait a moment. Then ask again.
- Avoid criticising, correcting and arguing. This could lead to conflict.

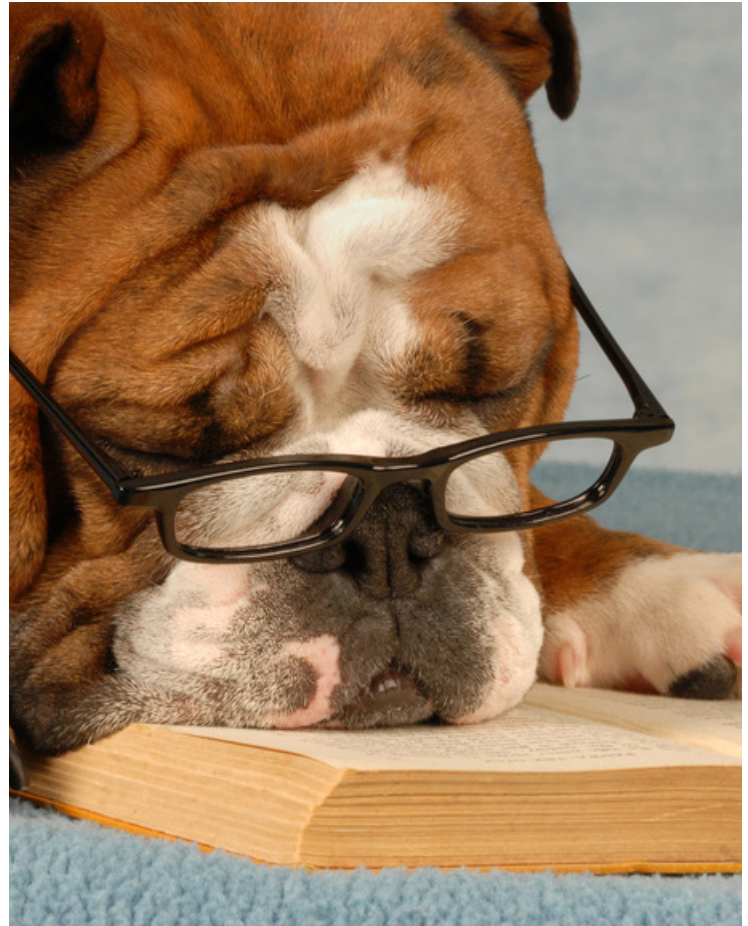
Communication Aids:

- Make the most of communication such as notes, writing instructions, keeping diaries to help with memory loss.



Use of Humour:

- Humour used at the right time can be beneficial to ease tension and promote good feelings.
- Avoid criticising, correcting and arguing. This could lead to conflict.
- Sometimes it is more worthwhile to just sit and say nothing, to enjoy the silence and the moment together.



Conversation Starters

Consider:

- Each person is unique.
- Establish previous roles through social connections.
- Activities for relaxation and pleasure.
- Meaningful interactions.
- Feelings of inadequacy.
- Over-stimulation.
- These ideas can be used to get you started in conversation where some communication difficulties exist, particularly in an unfamiliar environment.



- Enhance your conversation and be prepared - take a book or an ornament or something special to share.
- If you are heading out and about or just sitting around at home, these suggestions are for you to use to stimulate and sustain conversation. Or you could make your own.
- Take the chance - and use your imagination!
- Use pictures or photographs (examples - family and friends, special occasions, gardens, food, sport, machinery, cook books and animals).



- Gauge the person's interest by their reactions. If they are not showing interest, you may want to try something else.
- Explore the picture together by talking about what you can both see. Be prepared to journey together and stimulate all your senses.
- Follow the person's lead. Go with the flow of the conversation.
- Adapt your approach to meet the person's needs 'Stepping into their shoes'.



*What do you see when you
look at me?*

*What do you like about this
flower or tree?*

*What is the best thing for
you and for me?*

*And that is the question for
you to see?*





*For more information on communication,
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