



What to Say: Communication Tips for Dementia Caregivers

Simple, compassionate ways to reduce stress and support connection

Why communication matters

When memory changes, the goal is not to force perfect recall. The goal is to help your loved one feel safe, respected, and included. Small changes in tone, pacing, and wording can make everyday interactions calmer and more connected.

Core communication tips

- **Start with connection:** Approach from the front, say the person's name, and make gentle eye contact before you begin talking.
- **Keep it simple:** Use short sentences and one idea at a time. Pause between thoughts so the person has time to process.
- **Offer simple choices:** Instead of open-ended questions, try either-or options such as “Would you like tea or water?”
- **Use a calm tone:** A soft voice, relaxed pace, and reassuring body language often matter more than the exact words.
- **Do not argue or correct:** If the person is confused, respond to the feeling first rather than trying to win the facts.
- **Invite small participation:** Simple tasks like folding a towel, setting a napkin, or choosing a sweater can support dignity and involvement.

Helpful phrases to use

Do say	Try to avoid saying
I'm here with you.	You're wrong.
Let's do this together.	You don't remember, do you?
It's okay to take your time.	Why can't you remember that?
You're safe here.	Stop doing that.
Tell me more about that.	You're confused.

Tip: If you feel yourself getting upset, pause, take one slow breath, and then begin again. A calm reset helps both of you.

Meeting the person where they are

When someone has dementia, conversations may not always follow a straight line. Instead of correcting, quizzing, or pushing for the “right” answer, try helping the person re-enter the conversation with gentle support.

Older, emotionally meaningful memories are often easier to reach than recent facts. Familiar topics, simple cues, and patient pauses can help bring forward comfort and recognition.

Try these conversation supports:

- Start with familiar themes such as home, food, childhood, past work, music, pets, or favorite routines.
- Use yes/no or either-or questions if open-ended questions feel too hard.
- Rephrase gently instead of repeating the exact same question.
- Echo and expand what the person says to help the conversation continue.
- Use photos, objects, music, or scents as cues when words are hard to find.
- Allow repetition when possible. A repeated story may still bring comfort and connection.

Example

Person: “I used to work on a farm.”

You: “What kind of work did you do there?”

If they seem unsure, try a cue: “Were there cows or chickens?”

The goal is not to test memory. It is to support recognition, comfort, and conversation.

Looking for deeper support?



A compassionate caregiver guide that helps you care for yourself while offering practical, informed tools shaped by speech and occupational therapists with decades of experience.

For more support and guidance, explore:

Release: *Finding Peace Through and Beyond the Dementia Journey*

By David J. Oravec, OTR/L

Available on Amazon