Communication is vital to our well-being. People living with dementia slowly lose their language skills and their ability to express themselves freely. This has a profound impact on their quality of life.

There are many ways we can support people living with dementia to communicate more effectively. It is important to remember that how you say something is often more important than what you say. Patience and empathy are key.

Here are some tips to help communicate with people living with dementia.

1. Realise Your Challenge

Your client or loved one will get worse with time. Communication will become more difficult. On the other hand, remember there will be good days and bad days. Be prepared.

2. Be Patient

Communicating effectively is one of the greatest challenges seniors living with dementia face. Tolerate compassionately any delays, adversity or provocation.

3. Offer Reassurance

Listen attentively and empathize with their concerns even if they are delusional, confused, hesitating, or angry. Offer reassurance and support.

4. Minimize Background Noise

Noise can disturb and confuse people living with dementia. Find a quiet place to talk, away from the tv, radio, or people passing by.

5. Avoid Arguing

When talking, place yourself in front of your client and speak in a clear and warm tone. Use simple sentences and give clients ample time to respond. Do not contradict what they are saying and don't speak to them as you would to a young child.

6. Use Nonverbal Cues

Gestures, touch and facial expressions can assist communication. Observe if client's non-verbal cues...
indicate other messages, in spite of the words they are saying. Perhaps there are other feelings behind the words they are saying.

Related: Communication Cue Cards for Dementia Care

7. Be Precise

Avoid pronouns such as 'they' 'he' or 'she'. Refer to people by their preferred names.

8. Keep it simple

Focus on one subject at time; people living with dementia cannot handle two or three threads of conversation. If asking questions make sure they can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

9. Be Sensitive

When talking about your client in their presence, assume they can understand everything you say. Don't talk about them as if they were not there.

10. Take a Break

If you feel frustrated, take a break. You are not perfect! A person living with dementia is very capable of reading your body language. If you do not mean what you say they will know. Taking a break will benefit both parties.

Good Luck!
We'd love to hear your feedback!

What strategies have you found to work well to enhance communication with people living with dementia?