



Compassionate Communication



DO

- ✓ Give short, one-sentence explanations.
- ✓ Allow plenty of time for comprehension, and then triple it.
- ✓ Repeat instructions or sentences exactly the same way.
- ✓ Eliminate "but" from your vocabulary; substitute "nevertheless."
- ✓ Avoid insistence. Try again later.
- ✓ Agree with them or distract them to a different subject or activity.
- ✓ Accept the blame when something's wrong (even if it's fantasy).
- ✓ Leave the room, if necessary, to avoid confrontations.
- ✓ Respond to the feelings rather the words.
- ✓ Be patient and cheerful and reassuring. Do go with the flow.
- ✓ Practice 100% forgiveness. Memory loss progresses daily.
- ✓ Elevate your level of generosity and graciousness.



DON'T

- ✗ Don't argue.
- ✗ Don't remind them they forget.
- ✗ Don't reason.
- ✗ Don't question recent memory.
- ✗ Don't confront.
- ✗ Don't take it personally.

REMEMBER

- You can't control memory loss, only your reaction to it. Compassionate communication will significantly heighten quality of life.
- They are not crazy or lazy. They say normal things, and do normal things, for a memory impaired, dementia individual. Forgive them...always.
- They don't do or say things to intentionally offend you. If they did, they would have a different diagnosis.
- People with Alzheimer's are scared all the time. Each person reacts differently, they may become passive, uncooperative, hostile, angry, agitated, verbally abusive, or physically combative. They may even do them all at various times, or alternate between them. Anxiety may compel them to shadow you (follow everywhere). Anxiety compels them to resist changes in routine, even pleasant ones. Your goal is to reduce anxiety whenever possible. Also, they can't remember your reassurances. Keep saying them.
- Their illness is memory loss. They can't remember and therefore will repeat the same questions.
- People with Alzheimer's will hide things to protect them and then may forget where they put them. It is likely that they will blame others of stealing them. Don't take it personally.

Examples



DON'T ARGUE

Patient: "I didn't write this check for \$500. Someone at the bank is forging my signature."

- ✗ **Don't:** "What? Don't be silly! The bank wouldn't be forging your signature."
- ✓ **DO:** (*respond to feelings*) "That's a scary thought."
(*reassure*) "I'll make sure they don't do that."
(*distract*) "Would you help me fold the towels?"



DON'T REASON

Patient: "What doctor's appointment? There's nothing wrong with me."

- ✗ **Don't:** (*reason*) "You've been seeing the doctor every three months for the last two years. It's written on the calendar and I told you about it yesterday and this morning."
- ✓ **DO:** (*short explanation*) "It's just a regular checkup."
(*accept blame*) "I'm sorry if I forgot to tell you."



DON'T CONFRONT

Patient: "Nobody's going to make decisions for me. You can go now...and don't come back!"

- ✗ **Don't:** (*confront*) "I'm not going anywhere and you can't remember enough to make your own decisions."
- ✓ **DO:** (*accept blame or respond to feelings*) "I'm sorry this is a tough time."
(*reassure*) "I love you and we're going to get through this together."



DO ELIMINATE 'BUT'; SUBSTITUTE 'NEVERTHELESS'

Patient: "I'm not eating this. I hate chicken."

- ✗ **Don't:** (*say 'but'*) "I know chicken's not your favorite food, but it's what we are having for dinner."
- ✓ **DO:** (*say 'nevertheless'*) "I know chicken's not your favorite food, (*smile*) nevertheless, I'd appreciate it if you'd eat a little bit."



DON'T QUESTION RECENT MEMORY

Patient: "Hello, Mary. I see you've brought a friend with you."

- ✗ **Don't:** (*question memory*) "Hi Mom. You remember Eric, don't you? What did you do today?"
- ✓ **DO:** (*short explanation*) "Hi Mom. You look wonderful! This is Eric. We work together."



DON'T REMIND THEM THAT THEY FORGET

Patient: "Joe hasn't called for a long time. I hope he's o.k."

- ✗ **Don't:** (*remind*) "Joe called yesterday and you talked with him for 15 minutes."
- ✓ **DO:** (*reassure*) "You really like talking with him don't you?"
(*distract*) "Let's call him when we get back from our walk."



DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Patient: "Who are you? Where's my husband?"

- ✗ **Don't:** (*take it personally*) "What do you mean, who's your husband? I am!"
- ✓ **DO:** (*go with the flow, reassure*) "He'll be here for dinner."
(*distract*) "How about some milk and cookies?..."



DO REPEAT EXACTLY

Patient: "I'm going to the store for a newspaper."

- ✗ **Don't:** (*repeat differently*) "Please put your shoes on." ... "You'll need to put your shoes on."
- ✓ **DO:** "Please put your shoes on."



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