How to Use Supportive versus Confrontational Communication

Four Truths About Dementia:
1. At least 2 parts of the brain are dying—one related to memory and another part
2. It is chronic – can’t be fixed
3. It is progressive – it gets worse
4. It is terminal – it will kill, eventually

How Can We Become Better Communicators?
- Let go of the past to be in the moment
- Go with their flow
- Be willing to try something new
- Be willing to see it through another’s eyes
- Be willing to fail and try again
- Be a detective, not a judge
- Match your help to their remaining abilities
- Look, listen, offer, think
Then, Connect Emotionally:
- Make a connection
- Offer your name: “I’m (name) and you are…?”
- Offer a shared background: “I’m from (place) and you’re from…?”
- Offer a positive personal comment: “You look great in that!” or “I love that color on you.”

Connecting Emotionally:
- Identify common interest
- Say something nice about the person or their place
- Share something about yourself and encourage the person to share back
- Follow their lead and listen actively
- Use some of their words back to keep the flow going
- Remember it’s often the ‘first time’ for them, so expect repeats
- Use the phrase “Tell me about…”

To Communicate:
Just Having a Conversation
- The more you know, the better it will go
- Take it slow and go with the flow
- Later in the disease:
  - Use props or objects
  - Consider parallel engagement at first: look at the ‘thing,’ be interested, share it
  - Talk less, wait longer, take turns
  - Cover, don’t confront when you aren’t getting their words and just enjoy the exchange
  - Use automatic speech and social patterns to start interactions
  - Keep words short and emphasize the visual
Give Simple Information:

- Use Visual Cue (gesture/point) combined with a Verbal Cue:
  - “It's about time for…”
  - “Let's go this way…”
  - “Here are your socks…”
- Don't ask questions you don't want to hear the answer to!
- Acknowledge the response/reaction to your information
- Limit your words and keep it simple
- Wait!!!!

To Communicate When They’re Distressed:

First - Connect
Then - Use Supportive Communication
Finally - Move Together to Something New

To Connect When They’re Distressed:

- Send Visual Signal of connection:
  - Look concerned
- Send a Verbal Signal of connection:
  - Use the right tone of voice
- Send a physical signal of connection:
  - Give a light squeeze or sandwich the hand
  - Offer an open palm on shoulder or back
  - Offer a hug if the person is seeking more contact
Be a Detective, Not a Judge!

Try to figure out what is being communicated:
• Words
• Thoughts
• Actions
• Needs
• Beliefs

Don’t assume or presume
Don’t discount the message because of how it is delivered

Top Five Unmet Needs:

Physical Needs: Signals of Emotional Distress:
- Hydration and Nourishment
- Wake-sleep and active-rest cycles
- Elimination: all forms
- Find Comfort: 4Fs, 4Ss
- Pain-free:
  • Physical: body
  • Emotional: relationships
  • Spiritual: belonging/purpose
- Angry
- Sad
- Lonely
- Scared
- Bored – Lacking Purpose

What is Supportive Communication?

• Repeat a few of their words with a question at the end
• Avoid confrontational questions
• Use just a few words
• Go slow
• Use examples
• Fill in the blanks
• Listen, then offer empathy:
  “Sounds like…” or “Seems like…” or “Looks like…”
More Supportive Communication:

• Validate their emotions
  • Early Stage: “It’s really (label emotion) to have this happen” or “I’m so sorry this is happening to you!”
  • Mid Stage: Repeat their words with emotion:
    - Listen for added information, ideas, thoughts
    - Explore the new info by watching and listening
  • Late Stage: Check out the whole body:
    - Face, posture, movement, gestures, touching, looking
    - Look for the need under the words or actions

Once You’re Connected and Communicating:

Move Forward:
  • Add new words
  • Move to a new place or location
  • Add a new activity

Early Stage: Redirection
  • Same subject, different focus

Later Stage: Distraction
  • Different subject, unrelated but enjoyed

For All Communication:

If what you are trying is not working:
  • Stop!
  • Back off
  • Think it through, then:
    • Re-approach
    • Try something slightly different
Use empathy and go with the flow!

Reality Orientation

Telling Lies

Do:
- Go with the flow
- Use supportive communication techniques
- Use objects and the environment
- Give examples
- Use gestures and pointing
- Acknowledge and accept emotions
- Use empathy and validation
- Use familiar phrases or known interests
- Respect values and beliefs and avoid the negative
- Offer info if asked, monitoring the emotional state

Don’t:
- Try to control the flow
- Argue with them or correct their errors
- Ignore problem behaviors
- Use reality orientation and big lies
- Try a possible solution only once
- Try to stop the flow
- Reject topics
- Try to distract until you are well-connected
- Use negative visual cues
- Give up
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