



Tip #11

Communicate Caring When Words Fail

Do I communicate what I mean? A person may ignore my words, yet react to how they view my attitude. Communication involves sending and receiving both verbal and non-verbal messages. As memory loss progresses, words may become confusing, and word-finding is often frustrating. A person with memory loss will often mirror the non-verbal messages of the caregiver, and search for prompts to tell them how to respond. With such communication challenges, how can we acknowledge and support the person's feelings, when words may not make sense?

Action Steps:

Make sure the resident is not sensory deprived (i.e. hearing aids charged and in place, glasses, dentures, etc.)

1. Pay attention to your non-verbal language:
 - Tone of voice
 - Facial expressions
 - Body language
 - Mood
2. Smile. Use a friendly, patient, respectful approach. Honor the person's preferred traditions.
3. Face the person, get his/her attention, and make eye contact.
4. Be patient, slow down, and wait for a response. Often a person with memory loss needs more time to process what we are saying and formulate a response.
5. Enter the person's reality as if it is your own, to figure out a solution to their concern. Avoid correcting the person or telling them that they are wrong.
6. Clearly explain and demonstrate requests, with emphasis on the person's remaining abilities.
7. Use meaningful touch, humor, and laughter, when appropriate.
8. Praise, praise, praise! "You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar." With short-term memory loss, praise a person's effort repeatedly and/or compliment them often.

For more information and training:

- To find out more about the Advancing Excellence Person Centered Care Goal go to: www.nhqualitycampaign.org/goalDetail.aspx?q=PCC#.
- For information on how to conduct a Learning Circle go to: actionpact.com/assets/cache/learning-circle.pdf
- For more information and education on Person-Centered Care in Missouri go to the MC5 website at: www.momc5.com/.
- For more information about Person Centered Care and training across the country go to the Pioneer Network website at: www.pioneernetwork.net/.