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**Dementia Inclusive
Singing Network**

Communicating with people with dementia

Helpful tips and strategies for communicating effectively with people
with dementia

**Created by the Dementia Inclusive Singing Network with the
Age Scotland Dementia Training Team**

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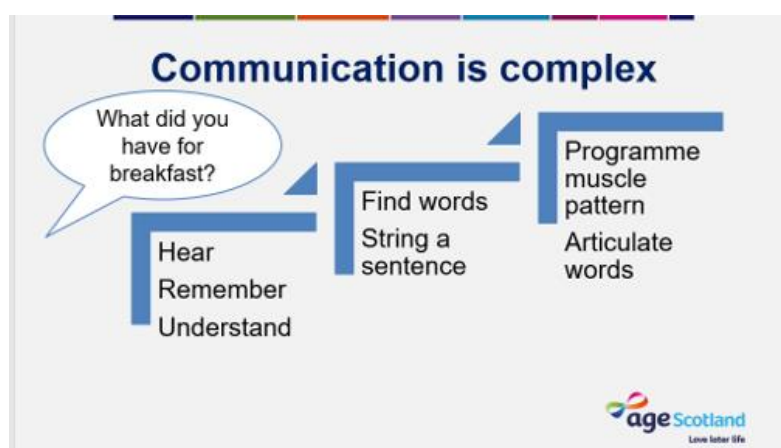


Communication and dementia: the challenges



Speaking, reading and writing connect us to other people and keep us informed about the world around us. Problems with communication can be isolating, confusing and distressing. Dementia can cause different issues with communication, including:

- **Difficulties understanding, processing and using language.**
This is known as aphasia ¹ and can result in problems with speaking, listening, responding, reading and writing/ typing.
- **Short-term memory loss**
This can lead to repetition and lack of recall.
- **Issues with appropriate behaviour**
People can react and speak rudely, angrily or inappropriately.
- **Problems processing visual information**
Reading, writing and seeing people's faces can be difficult. Certain types of dementia can also lead to hallucinations, causing distress and confusion.



Chain of Communication from The Stroke

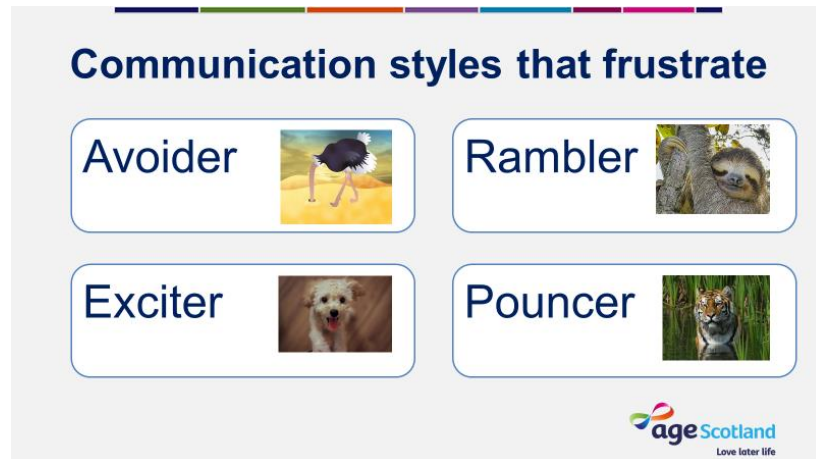
Barriers to good communication for people living with dementia can also be due to their surroundings, particularly if there is too much background noise or inadequate lighting. Being too hot, too cold, uncomfortable, hungry or thirsty may also cause problems.

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Aphasia/>



Communication Styles

Other people's discomfort or lack of skill at talking to people with dementia can also be a barrier ², and certain ways of talking can make it hard for someone with dementia to follow or respond.



Trying to talk to someone who is . . .

- avoiding eye contact
- mumbling
- not facially expressive
- using too many words or words which are too long
- not keeping to the point,
- too many hand gestures
- talking too fast
- not giving time to answer - leaping in. . .

. . . can all cause real problems for people with dementia.

It is always better to be calm, encouraging, use simple, short sentences and present only one idea at a time.

² A 2017 survey by the Scottish Centre for Social Research found that one third of people would find it hard to talk to someone with dementia.

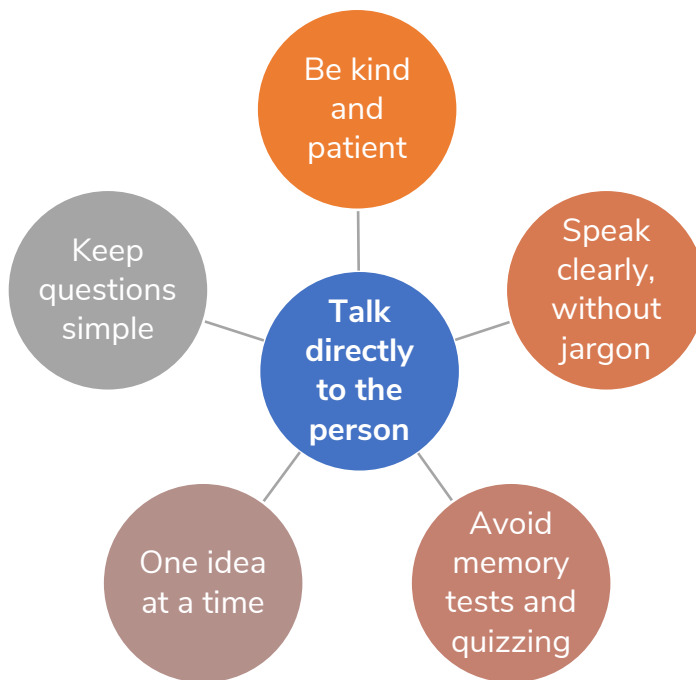


Communication and dementia: helpful hints and tips

Getting the environment right

Make sure there are no interruptions, that the room is well lit (ideally daylight), and that the person is comfortable. Dementia can make some people sensitive to noise so, for example, music or a TV on in the background can interfere with the ability to communicate.

Talking to people with dementia



Phone calls

Phone calls can be particularly challenging for people with dementia. The lack of any visual cues from the other speaker can make the conversation hard to follow, so more time and gentle prompting may be needed to enable them to respond and take part in the conversation.

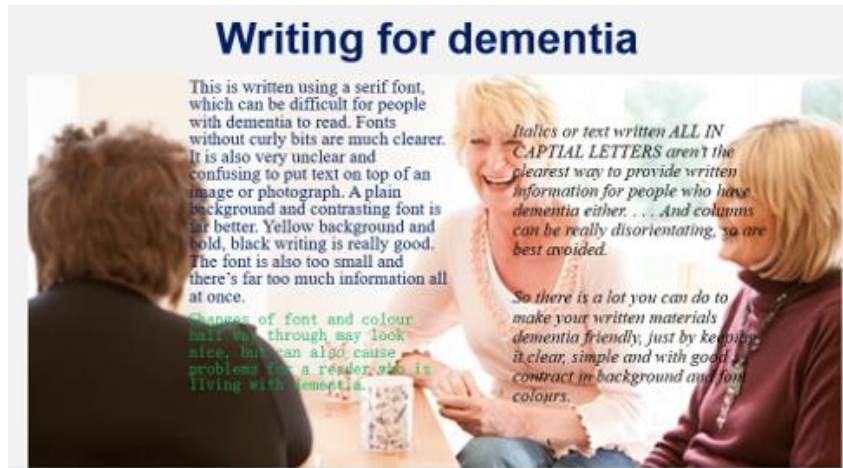


Another challenge is presented by call handling systems where people have to go through various steps to reach the person they need to talk to. Organisations are encouraged to rethink and simplify these where possible.



Written communication

The image below presents information in a way which is very difficult to read (Don't try to read it! The same information is presented in the image underneath.)



This is better

- Clear sans serif font (no curly bits!) – not too small
- Ideas presented / summarised as simply as possible
- Plain background (no photos!) and good contrast between background and font colours
- Same font all the way through
- No columns
- No italics
- Appropriate pictures or symbols can help

