**Communication Skills**

**Better communication can ease some of the symptoms of dementia by helping a person feel more supported and understood.**

1. **Approach people from the front. It can be confusing to hear a sound from behind you from someone you can’t see.**
2. **Make eye contact. It’s easier to focus on and connect with someone looking at you.**
3. **Clear communication is difficult if there is a frantic energy involved.**
4. **Speak slowly in short, clear sentences. Don’t put too many phrases together. Talking too quickly is confusing to anyone!**
5. **Allow time for the message to be heard and processed. Don’t be afraid of silence. It might mean that someone is really listening and processing.**
6. **Speak in an adult fashion. Sing-song tones that we use with children are insulting to adults.**
7. **Reinforce your message with a gesture. It we make eye contact and use words and gestures, our message is being understood in three ways.**
8. **Don’t interrupt. First of all, it’s rude. Second, the person might need extra time to explain themselves. Allow them the time to get their thoughts across.**
9. **Watch the nonverbal expressions. People with dementia might not have the right words, but they project the emotions that can come through in gestures, sounds, and behaviors. Read all of these as communication.**
10. **Repeat what you don’t understand. Ask for clarification by repeating to show them what you’ve heard. Do this without judgment. You are simply seeking clarification.**
11. **Validate feelings. If you can sense a person’s feeling, even if they can’t explain them, try to identify what you are sensing from them. (e.g. “It feels like you are frustrated. I know this must be frustrating.”)**
12. **Avoid slang. Slang often involves metaphors that can be difficult. (e.g. “count your chickens” might be confusing for a person with dementia. They might look around for chickens.)**
13. **Ask one question at a time. We have a tendency to pile questions on each other. Think of one clear question, and ask it; then allow time for response.**
14. **Begin by identifying yourself. Even if you think someone knows you very well, you can always remind them of your name in a gracious way.**
15. **Follow their lead and topics. Go where the person takes you. Sometimes the very best conversations are the most unexpected.**