

10 THINGS TO SAY

INSTEAD OF CORRECTING THEM

A quick-reference script guide for dementia caregivers — from a nurse who uses these every day

You don't have to choose between honesty and kindness. These are real phrases I use with my own mum, organized by the situation you're most likely facing right now — so you can find the right one fast, even mid-moment.

1. When they ask for someone who has passed away

They say: "Where's my husband?"

Try: "He's at work right now — he'll be back later."

Why it works: Retelling the loss re-triggers real grief, every single time. Meeting them in their reality is kinder than correcting it.

2. When they accuse you of stealing or hiding something

They say: "You took my money."

Try: "That's scary — let's look for it together."

Why it works: The accusation isn't really about you. It's fear talking. Defending yourself escalates it; searching together calms it.

3. When they insist they need to go somewhere

They say: "I have to go pick up the kids."

Try: "They're already taken care of — let's have a cup of tea first."

Why it works: A gentle deferral buys time for the urge to pass, without an argument about facts they can't hold onto.

4. When they don't recognize you

They say: "Who are you?"

Try: "I'm someone who's here to help you today."

Why it works: Insisting "it's me, your daughter" can frighten rather than reassure. Lead with safety, not identity.

5. When they resist getting dressed or bathing

They say: "No, I don't want to."

Try: "Arms first." (one step, then wait)

Why it works: Too many choices at once overwhelms. One instruction at a time removes the decision-making that's causing resistance.

6. When they refuse food or medication

They say: "I'm not taking that."

Try: "Let's have this together" — then eat/take yours alongside them.

Why it works: Modeling the action removes the confrontation. It becomes something shared, not something forced.

7. When they're anxious about "going home" — even at home

They say: "I want to go home."

Try: "We'll head there soon. Tell me about it while we wait."

Why it works: "Home" is often a feeling of safety, not a location. Arguing geography rarely resolves the underlying anxiety.

8. When they repeat the same question over and over

They say: "What time is it?" (5th time)

Try: Answer exactly as calmly as the first time.

Why it works: To them, it's the first time asking. Your patience — not the accuracy of a new answer — is what reassures them.

9. When they get agitated in public or at appointments

They say: (raised voice, restlessness)

Try: "You're safe. I'm right here. We can step outside for a minute."

Why it works: New environments raise overstimulation fast. Lowering stimulation works faster than lowering your voice to explain.

10. When you don't know what to say at all

They say: (any moment of confusion or distress)

Try: "You're safe. I'm here."

Why it works: When in doubt, validate the feeling, not the facts. This phrase works almost everywhere, every time.

These aren't scripts to memorize word-for-word — they're a way of thinking: validate the feeling, not the fact.

Facing a doctor's appointment or hospital visit next? I made a free guide for that too — the same calm, one-step approach, built for higher-stress medical settings.