



A program of Choices Healthcare

## **Validation for People Living with Dementia**

Dementia is a broad term that describes loss of memory, language, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life. Diseases like Alzheimer's and others that result in dementia-like symptoms can cause actual changes in the connections of neurons and tissue of the brain. As a result, people may be affected in a variety of ways. Short-term memory is often affected first, making it challenging to remember recent events or learn new information. In addition to having difficulty recalling information and reasoning, one's personality, emotional state, and behavior can also be altered.

If the patient is exhibiting signs or experiencing symptoms of dementia:

- Try to remain calm and be patient.
- Get the patient's attention before initiating a conversation by using their name.
- Approach them from the front, and begin conversations with a positive attitude. Your emotions can affect your reactions.
- Be sure to introduce yourself by name, get on their level, and establish and maintain eye contact to help them focus.
- State your messages clearly and simply, slowing your pace and lowering the pitch of your voice.
- Use specific names of people, objects, and places instead of pronouns (he, she, they, it, etc.).
- Be an active listener. Observe nonverbal cues that may help you better understand the message the patient is trying to share.
- Allow extra time for them to respond. If they are struggling to find words, try to guess what they are trying to communicate, or suggest words to help them.
- Redirection can sometimes help if the patient is frustrated or upset.

When the patient does not respond to situations as they would have previously:

- Remain calm and do not argue, criticize, or correct them.
- Try not to take their reactions personally. It is not possible to change people who are living with dementia. Remember that their reactions are shaped by changes in the brain and trying to control the behavior is often unsuccessful and is frequently met with resistance.
- Focus on calmly validating the feelings the patient is experiencing and finding ways to accommodate the behavior. Keep in mind that strategies that are successful in redirecting and comforting your loved one today may not work in the future due to changes in their condition.
- Be creative and flexible with your responses.

People who are living with dementia can become confused and feel anxious or unsure about their surroundings. They may recall things or events that did not occur. When this happens, avoid correcting or attempting to convince them they are wrong. Instead, focus on the feelings they are experiencing in that moment, which are real. Try to see things from their perspective. Validate their feelings, reassure them, and use redirection or distraction to calm them. For example, if the patient is upset because they

believe someone has not called them recently, you might validate their feelings and reassure them by saying, "I understand how upset you are. You like talking to Tom, don't you?" Next, you might redirect or distract the patient by suggesting another preferred activity. For example, you might say, "Let's call Tom when he is available after we read the next chapter in our book." It may be necessary to try multiple suggestions until you find one that is comforting to the patient.

Remember that all behaviors have a purpose and occur for a reason. The patient may no longer be able to express their wants or needs verbally. As a result, their behavior is a form of communication.

- Try to determine what needs the patient is trying to communicate to you through their behavior.
- Be sure to watch for nonverbal signs of discomfort or pain. Specific signs to watch for include facial expressions like grimacing or frowning; tightening of muscles or rubbing a specific area; vocal sounds like grunting or groaning; increased heart rate or body temperature; and signs of agitation.

If your loved one has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, or if they are exhibiting symptoms of dementia, it is important to speak with their care team. Providing care to someone living with dementia can be challenging and sometimes exhausting; we encourage you to talk to a Hospice team member about self-care and possible respite options available to you. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call our 24-hour number, (877) 506-0149.