



Hints for Conversing with a Loved One Who Lives with Memory Impairment

Caregiving for a family member suffering from memory loss or Alzheimer's disease is highly demanding. Attempts at communication can become particularly challenging.

Foster Better Conversation

Here are a few hints that may foster better conversation and understanding with your loved one:

- Have a full and clear knowledge of their abilities. Use these abilities in talking with them, as well as using language they understand; this will help avoid frustration.
- Use their first name in speaking to them, and never talk about them in their presence as if they weren't there.
- Approach them from the front to avoid surprise.
- Always move to their same physical level so they can see you.
- You can use touch as reassurance or to get their attention, but use it with care and stop if it causes agitation.
- Identify yourself before addressing the person by name. Introduce others in the room by name and have your loved one repeat the name to avoid the embarrassment of not being able to identify people in social situations.
- Use simple words, favoring sentences and statements over questions. Avoid questions with one-word answers, as this sets them up for failure. Stay away from memory questions, as this may cause frustration.
- Use repetition. It's better to be overly repetitive than cause frustration or aggravation.
- Converse slowly, giving them plenty of time to respond.
- Smile and use humor.

Verbal Signals

Here are a couple of verbal signals from your loved one that may indicate the need for you to redirect or halt your conversation:

- **They ask for the time of day.** This may be a sign of boredom. Add activity or another form of engagement to your conversation time with them.
- **They ask for home.** This may reflect insecurity and a lack of knowing their place in the world. Acknowledge their feeling of loss and then reassure them that you are there to help.
- **They ask for their parents.** Love and security are wanted. Again, let them know you're there for them.

Resources: Loverde, Joy. [The Complete Eldercare Planner, Updated and Revised, 2009](#), Random House; [How To Say It To Seniors: Closing the Communication Gap with Our Elders](#) David Solie, M.S., P.A.

