

Communication



WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might have changes in their brains that cause them to:

- have a tough time finding the right word
- lose their train of thought
- have problems following a conversation
- not be able to understand what you are saying
- speak only in their native or first language



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dshs.wa.gov/altsa/dementia-action-collaborative

People with Alzheimer's or dementia can lose their ability to speak clearly and understand what you are saying. This can be frustrating both for the person with Alzheimer's and for you.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

USE SHORT SENTENCES & SIMPLE WORDS

- give short, one sentence answers
- offer one step directions
- slowly repeat instructions or sentences if not understood the first time
- be patient and positive, even when it takes a long time to answer
- try not to remind them that they forgot or already told you something
- ask a question and offer a simple choice of answers such as "What do you want for dinner? Fish or chicken?"
- ask questions that can be answered with yes or no
- try not to use "baby talk" or a "baby voice"
- avoid negative words. Instead of "Don't go out that door!" try "Let's go this way!" and gently guide the person away

FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ON YOU

- get on their eye level
- call the person by name
- remove distractions — turn off TV, go to a quiet room
- pay attention to your tone, how loudly you are speaking and your body language — which often "speak" louder than words
- be an active listener — make eye contact, nod your head

OTHER IDEAS TO TRY

- put up signs or pictures to explain what is in the room or cabinet
- have the person's hearing tested to make sure they can hear
- use a chalk or white board to write the schedule for the day or the answers to frequently asked questions
- respond to the person's feelings or emotions, not only to words
- if conversation is hard but you want to do something together, try listening to music or looking at old family photos