

# **Alzheimer's Association's Effective Communication Strategies**

The following information was summarized from the Education Series on Dementia and Alzheimer's presented by the Alzheimer's Association this summer/fall, 2017.

**For questions or more information visit the Alzheimer's Association at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) or their 24/7 helpline at 800-272-3900.**

***Communication changes throughout the disease – changes you may notice include:***

## **Early stage (mild)**

- ✓ Difficulty with hearing.
- ✓ Difficulty finding the right words.
- ✓ Taking longer to speak or respond.
- ✓ Withdrawing from conversations.
- ✓ Struggling with decision-making or problem-solving.

## **Middle stage (moderate)**

- ✓ Difficulty with hearing.
- ✓ Increased difficulty finding the right words.
- ✓ Using familiar words repeatedly.
- ✓ Inventing new words to describe familiar things.
- ✓ Easily losing train of thought. Speaking less frequently.
- ✓ Communicating through behavior rather than words more often.

## **Late stage (severe)**

- ✓ Communication is reduced to a few words or sounds.
- ✓ Possible responses to familiar words or phrases have changed.

***Communication tips to help connect in all stages of the disease include:***

- *Have the person's hearing checked by a professional.*
- *Join the person's reality to connect. Understand and accept what you can and cannot change.*

- *Remember that the person retains a sense of self, despite the losses of the disease. Demonstrate respect and connect with the person through feelings.*
- *Always treat the person as the adult he or she is. Keep respect and empathy in mind to assess the person's needs.*
- *Recognize the effects of your mood and actions towards that person.*
- *Avoid criticizing, correcting and arguing. Pay attention to your tone of voice.*
- *Try to decode the person's communications. Let the person know you hear their concerns whether they are expressed through words, behavior or both.*
- *Keep sentences clear, straightforward and speak directly to the person.*
- *Provide brief answers using short sentences and basic words. Speak slowly, clearly to one person at a time.*
- *Write things down for the person, repeat information, avoid quizzing and turn negatives into positives.*
- *Help meet the needs while soothing and calming the person.*

***In the late stage of the disease also remember to:***

- *Listen for expressions of pain and respond promptly.*
- *Help the person feel safe and happy.*
- ***Use all five senses to communicate*** *such as identify everyday items in a bag by touch, visit with animals, hold the person's hand or stroke their arm or back. Watch videos of animals, nature or travel. Look at photo albums together, go outdoors or sit by an open window. Visit museums and aquariums. Listen to familiar music and recordings of the sounds of nature, farms, cities or animals. Read books, poetry, scripture or articles to the person. Offer favorite foods and cook foods that smell good such as soups, cookies and pies. Make small plastic bags containing items for the person to smell –herbs, spices, flowers, teas, coffee beans and essential oils.*