



Communication & Alzheimer's

NOTES FROM THE PARISH NURSE

This message is about communication with people who have dementia or Alzheimer's. "Communication is more than the transfer of information; it is the forming of a connection that includes heart and soul, thought and feeling. What transforms an interaction into a visit, and a communication into a conversation, is as simple as your state of mind." (Claudia J. Strauss, *Talking to Alzheimer's*) It is important to prepare for a visit with a person who has dementia. Relax and clear your mind, focus on the present moment, be flexible and open to whatever happens, and remember that everyone is unique. It also helps to have the environment conducive to conversation. Avoid background noise and distraction; turn off the television. If the person wears hearing aids or glasses, be sure the hearing aids are in and working and that the glasses are on and clean. Remove clutter which might be confusing and dangerous. Ensure that lighting is adequate.

Following are some communication tips that you may find useful.

- Introduce yourself
- Be aware of non-verbal communication
- Keep it short, simple, and direct
- Allow time for the person to respond
- Be prepared to repeat and for the person with dementia to repeat
- Be respectful
- Don't ask questions that rely on short term memory
- Know the person (interests, hobbies, family)
- Share personal interests which can be a good conversation starter
- Find ways to make the person feel good
- Don't correct or argue
- Listen with interest and without judging
- Offer genuine touch and concern

Sometimes sharing simple activities can work well on a visit with a friend who has dementia. Look at old photos, ask for the person's help with a simple project or chore, adapt familiar games, play with a pet, take a walk, look at old photos, or reminisce.

Music is also a great way to interact with a person who has dementia. "Music is stored in a different part of our brain than many other kinds of memory -- and is one of the last things to be affected by Alzheimer's. People who have trouble forming a sentence can often still sing along and enjoy a favorite hymn. People with memory loss can often still read -- even when they do not fully comprehend what they're reading. The words to familiar prayers, songs, and Bible passages can be comforting -- and persons with memory loss can often still participate and feel connected through these activities"

It is up to all of us to help our friends with dementia cope with and enjoy life. Hopefully some of these ideas will help you to stay in touch with your special friends.