

Compassionate Communication With the Memory Impaired

*Excerpted from compassionate Communication™
By Liz Ayres*

DON'T

- Don't reason
- Don't argue
- Don't confront
- Don't remind them they forget
- Don't question recent memory
- Don't take it personally

DO

- Give short, one sentence explanations
- Allow plenty of time for comprehension, then triple it
- Repeat instructions of sentences exactly the same way
- Eliminate “but” from your vocabulary, substitute “nevertheless”
- Avoid insistence – try again later
- Agree with them or distract them to a different subject or activity
- Accept the blame when something is wrong (even if it's a fantasy)
- Leave the room, if necessary, to avoid confrontations
- Respond to the feelings rather than the words
- Be patient, cheerful, and reassuring
- Go with the flow
- Practice 100% forgiveness. Memory loss progresses daily
- My appeal to you: please elevate your level of generosity and graciousness

Don't Reason

- Patient: “What doctor’s appointment? There’s nothing wrong with me.”
- Don't: (Reason) “You’ve been seeing the doctor every three months for the last two years. It is written on the calendar and I told you about it yesterday and this morning.”
- Do: (Short explanation) “It’s just a regular check-up.”
(Accept blame) “I’m sorry if I forgot to tell you.”

Don't Argue

- Patient: "I didn't write this check for \$500.00. Someone at the bank is forging my signature."
- Don't: (Argue) "What? Don't be silly! The bank wouldn't be forging your signature."
- Do: (Respond to feelings) "That's a scary thought."
(Reassurance) "I'll make sure they don't do that."
(distract) "Would you help me fold the towels?"

Don't Confront

- Patient: "Nobody's going to make decisions for me. You can go now... and don't come back!"
- Don't: (Confront) "I'm not going anywhere and you can't remember enough to make your own decisions."
- Do: (Accept blame or respond to feelings) "I'm sorry this is a tough time."
(Reassurance) "I love you and we're going to get through this together."
(Distract) "You know what? Don has a new job. He's really excited about it."

Don't Question Recent Memory

- Patient: "Hello Mary. I see you've brought a friend with you."
- Don't: (Question memory) "Hi Mom. You remember Eric don't you? What did you do today?"
- Do: (Short explanations) "Hi Mom. You look wonderful. This is Eric. We work together."

Don't Take it Personally

- Patient: "Who are you? Where is my husband?"
- Don't: (Take it personally) "What do you mean – who's your husband? I am!"
- Do: (Go with the flow, reassurance) "He'll be home for dinner."
(Distract) "How about some milk and cookies? Would you like chocolate chip or oatmeal?"