



The Facts about...

Communicating Compassionately with People Living with Memory Loss

DON'T

- Don't reason
- Don't argue
- Don't confront
- Don't remind them they forgot
- 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 sentences or instructions 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 blame when something is wrong (even if it is fantasy)
- Leave the room, if necessary, to avoid confrontation
- Respond to feelings rather than words
- Be patient, cheerful and reassuring. Go with the flow.
- Practice 100% forgiveness.

REMEMBER

- You can't control memory loss - you can control your reaction to it. Compassionate communication will significantly heighten quality of life.
- They are not crazy or lazy. They say and do things that seem normal to them.
- Don't take accusations personally.
- Don't ask too many questions that they may struggle to answer
- Open-ended questions that give choices are difficult and can create anxiety. A simple choice between two items, or directing choice, is better, e.g. "You look lovely in the red blouse; let's choose that one".
- People who are living with memory loss will be scared all the time. This may come out as becoming passive, un-cooperative, hostile, angry, agitated or abusive. It may alternate between each state. The goal is to reduce anxiety as far as possible. Keep reassuring them; they may forget the reassurances you gave five minutes ago.

DON'T REASON		
Person living with Memory Loss	"What doctor's appointment? There's nothing wrong with me."	
Carer Don't	Reason	"You've been seeing the doctor every three months for the last two years. It's written on the calendar and I told you about it yesterday, and this morning."
Carer Do	Explain simply	"It's just a regular check-up" (repeat as necessary)
Carer Do	Accept blame	"I'm sorry if I forgot to tell you"

DON'T ARGUE		
Person living with Memory Loss	"I didn't write this cheque for £50. Someone at the bank is forging my signature."	
Carer Don't	Argue	"What? Don't be silly. The bank wouldn't be forging your signature."
Carer Do	Respond to feelings	"That's a scary thought."
Carer Do	Reassure	"I'll make sure they don't do that."
Carer Do	Distract	"Would you help me fold the towels?"

DON'T CONFRONT		
Person living with Memory Loss	"Nobody's going to make decisions for me. You can go now ... and don't come back."	
Carer Don't	Confront	"I'm not going anywhere and you can't remember enough to make your own decisions."
Carer Do	Respond to feelings	"I'm sorry this is a tough time."
Carer Do	Reassure	"We will find a way to manage it together."
Carer Do	Distract	"You know what? There's a postcard here from Peter..."

DON'T REMIND THEM THAT THEY FORGOT		
Homeowner	"Peter hasn't called for ages. I hope he's OK."	
Sharer Don't	Remind	"Peter called yesterday and you spoke to him for 15 minutes."
Sharer Do	Reassure	"You really like talking to Peter, don't you?"
Sharer Do	Distract	"Let's phone him when we get back from our walk."

DON'T QUESTION RECENT MEMORY		
Person living with Memory Loss	"I'm hungry. What's for lunch? Will it be ready soon?"	
Carer Don't	Question memory	"You had lunch an hour ago."
Carer Do	Explain simply	"It will be time for a snack at 4pm".

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY		
Person living with Memory Loss	"Who are you? Where is my daughter?"	
Carer Don't	Take it personally	"What do you mean you want your daughter, not me?"
Carer Do	Reassure	"She'll be here tomorrow..."
Carer Do	Distract	"Why don't we have a cup of tea and a biscuit?"

DO REPEAT EXACTLY		
Person living with Memory Loss	"I'm going out to buy a newspaper"	
Carer Don't	Repeat differently	"If you're going out you will need to put your shoes on. Please put your shoes on."
Carer Do	Repeat exactly	"Please put your shoes on." "Please put your shoes on."

DO ELIMINATE ‘BUT’ AND SUBSTITUTE ‘NEVERTHELESS’		
Person living with Memory Loss	“I’m not eating this. I hate fish.”	
Carer Don’t	Say ‘but’	“I know that fish isn’t your favourite but it is very good for you.”
Carer Do	Say ‘nevertheless’	“I know that fish isn’t your favourite <i>(smile)</i> , nevertheless please try a little bit as it is so delicious”

Support services

- National Dementia helpline 0300 222 1122
- Age UK’s Memory Loss Support service
01442 259049 (9.00am - 4.00pm Monday to Friday)
- ‘Memory People’ Facebook support group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/180666768616259/>

To contact Share and Care Homeshare:

Tel: 020 3865 3398 or 020 8405 6316
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This fact sheet should only be used as a guideline and we recommend you seek professional advice.