Communication Tips for Alzheimer’s Disease

Alzheimer’s disease gradually diminishes a person’s ability to communicate. People with dementia have more difficulty expressing thoughts and emotions, as well as more trouble understanding others. Here are some tips to help in communication and understanding:

• Learn to create a ‘kind voice’ – slower, lower, smiling.
• Talk slowly and clearly.
• To orient the person and get his or her attention:
  – Call the person by name.
  – Always approach the person from the front so there are no surprises.
  – Tell the person who you are, even if you are the spouse or child.
• Ask one question at a time.
• Use short, simple words and sentences.
• Avoid using logic and reason.
• Avoid quizzing.
• Avoid asking, “Do you remember when...?”
• Do not take any negative communication personally.
• Be careful not to interrupt.
• Avoid criticizing, correcting and arguing.
• Let the person know you are listening and trying to understand what is being said.
  – Keep good eye contact.
  – Show the person that you care about what is being said.
• Patiently wait for a response as extra time may be required to process your request.
• Repeat information and questions. If the person doesn’t respond, wait a moment. Then ask again.
• Focus on the feelings, not the facts.
  – Sometimes the emotions being expressed are more important than what is being said.
• Let the person think about and describe whatever he or she wants.
  – If the person uses the wrong word or cannot find a word, try guessing the right one.
  – If you don’t understand what is being said, ask the person to point or gesture.

Tip resources: the Alzheimer’s Association Web site www.alz.org