



Florida REACH Project

Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health

Prescription for Communication Difficulty

Specific Behavior:

Overall Goal of this Prescription:

Please remember that dealing with challenging behaviors can be stressful. The brief relaxation strategies will help you deal with stress when dealing with this challenge. In particular, we recommend using the signal breath technique immediately before you use the strategies suggested in this behavioral prescription.

Strategies for preventing a challenging behavior from occurring (try picking one thing and sticking with it for a few weeks):

1) Help your loved one focus attention on you.

- Call him/her by name.
- Stand in front of the person as he/she is trying to communicate with you.
- Gently touch his/her hand or arm as you speak, while maintaining eye contact.
- You may need to use orienting information before trying to communicate: identify yourself and others to put your loved one at ease.
- Reduce or eliminate distractions (e.g., turn off the TV) to allow him/her to focus attention on you and the situation.
- Remain patient, allowing your loved one time to finish his/her thoughts.

2) Use memory aids

- Use index cards to remind your loved of daily activities that need to be done, such as brushing teeth or dressing.
- Use a memory board (chalk board or white board) for where you can write notes such as a phone number and note about where you are going when you leave the house. You can also use this to write the day and date, or to leave comforting messages.

Other strategies:



Strategies for guiding how you respond during or after a behavior occurs:

- 1) **Use one-step instructions.** Break each task into the simplest steps and give instructions one step at a time.
- 2) **Speak slowly and say individual words clearly.** Your loved one needs extra time for his/her brain to understand what you are saying.
- 3) **Be aware of the tone of your voice when you are communicating.** Use soothing and warm tones accompanied by positive facial expressions (smiling and eye contact). Avoid raising your voice.
- 4) **Use gestures to help communication.** (Pointing, flat hand to indicate “stop,” motion for “come here,” nodding or shaking head for “yes” and “no.”)
- 5) **Give simple choices that can be answered with YES or NO.**
- 6) **Do not argue.** Avoid trying to argue or convince. It will frustrate you and your loved one and make the situation worse. You cannot win an argument with a loved one with memory problems.
- 7) **Please consider the following:**
 - Adjust what you expect from your loved one. His/her communication abilities are related to the disease. Please realize that you will need to learn new ways to communicate.
 - Don’t expect these tips to be easy or to come naturally. You will need to practice these skills.
 - Whenever communication problems occur, make a calming and comforting statement to your loved one. Try to avoid looks of frustration and irritation.
 - If your loved one is having trouble communicating, try to delay the activity or event until another time. Consider saying, “Let’s wait and come back to that thought.”

General Information:

You are a dedicated caregiver and you are doing a great job. We understand that this can be very upsetting to you and are committed to helping you with this challenge. We believe these strategies will help and look forward to working with you in the coming weeks.

Remember that you can reach out to the social workers on your team if you have any questions or concerns.