

Communicating Well

WITH DEMENTIA



Aberdeen City

Community Speech & Language Therapy
Service

MESSAGE

M

Maximise Attention

E

Expression and Body Language

S

Simple

S

Support the Conversation

A

Assist with Visual Aids

G

Get the Message

E

Encourage and Engage in Conversation

M

MAXIMISE ATTENTION

Environment

Reduce distractions

Talk one at a time

➤ The **right time**

- Not distracted by hunger or needing the toilet
- Not too tired

➤ The **right place**

- In the same room
- Quiet and calm
- Minimise background noise – switch off the TV/ radio; close the door/ window
- Consider lighting

➤ **Face-to-face** so you can see each other and maintain eye contact

➤ **Glasses, hearing aids, dentures**

➤ **One-to-one** conversations are best. If in a group:

- One person talking at a time
- Give direct opportunities to join in
 - Remind of topic and summarise what has been said
 - Ask a YES/ NO question or a choice question
- Consider position

E

**EXPRESSION &
BODY LANGUAGE**

Body language

Facial Expression

Tone of voice

[YOURS & THEIRS!!]

- **Gestures and pointing** add meaning to spoken words.
- **Touch/ holding hands** may help maintain attention and provide reassurance.
- **Understanding of nonverbal communication is usually maintained longer** than understanding of spoken words.
- Try to **convey respect and patience**.
- Make and maintain **eye contact**.
- **Listen with your eyes** as well as your ears
 - Look for meaning behind the words
 - Read facial expression and body language

S

SIMPLE

Keep it simple

Sentences

Vocabulary

Offer clear choices

Avoid he/ she/ it

- **Keep sentences short and simple.**
- **Break down instructions** into individual steps.
- Use a **slightly slower rate** but there is no need to shout!
- Pause to **allow time to process** information.
- **Ask choice questions** rather than open questions:
 - *Would you like tea or coffee?*
- **Allow plenty time** for a response.
- **Use actual names** rather than he/ she/ they/ it.
- Say what you mean – **don't imply or suggest.**

S

SUPPORT THE CONVERSATION

Allow time

Repeat

Rephrase

Remind

**Support Word Finding Difficulties
(WFDs)**

- Stay **calm and relaxed**.
- **Allow time to process** what you have said **and to respond**.
- **Emphasise key words**.
- **Repeat** yourself if necessary.
- If still not understood, **rephrase**.
- Keep the **topic clear** and avoid rapid topic changes.
- If there are **word-finding difficulties** (WFDs) **give plenty of time** to see if *they* can find the word. If you jump in too quickly they might lose their train of thought.
 - Allow **extra time**.
 - Encourage them to **explain a different way**.
 - Ask them to **show you or take you** to the thing.
 - Listen for the **overall gist**.
 - Judge or *ask* if they **want you to help or guess**.

A

Assist with Visual Aids

Gesture

Objects

Pictures/ Charts

Life Stories

- Spoken words last only an instant. Give more time by adding:
 - **Written words**
 - **Pictures**
 - **Gestures**
 - **Real objects**

- Use real objects, written words or pictures to **help with understanding** and remembering **topic of conversation**.

- **Other props** can be useful:
 - Newspapers
 - Maps
 - Timetables
 - Calendars
 - Clocks

- **Photos**
 - **Add names/ captions** to the back of photos
 - A **photo of the person or place you are going to** can be reassuring
 - **Old photos** can stimulate memories

➤ Use **written words and pictures** to support memory and understanding:

- List **useful words** like names or places
- **Labels in rooms or drawers** can be helpful
- **A diary or visitor's book** to record daily events
- **Pen and paper** beside the phone

➤ **Life Stories**

- Can be a book, album, memory box or poster
- Can include information about
 - *Childhood*
 - *Education*
 - *Working life*
 - *Family*
 - *Hobbies*
 - *Likes and Dislikes*
- Record of **proud moments, favourite activities and memories**
- Helps to **feel valued and worthwhile**
- Can be **useful distraction** from less helpful thoughts and behaviours

G

**Get the
Message**

ANY way you can

Message IN

Message OUT

It doesn't matter how **you** get the message across.

➤ It doesn't matter how **they** get the message across.

➤ Use **all means possible**.

➤ **Message OUT**

○ When they are trying to communicate something

▪ **Give time**

▪ **Encourage all means** of communication

▪ **Look beyond the words**

➤ **Message IN**

○ When you are communicating something. Help them to understand by:

▪ Keeping it **short and simple**

▪ **Repeating**

▪ **Rephrasing**

▪ **Reminding**

▪ Using **all means possible**

• **Written key words**

• **Drawing**

• **Gestures/pointing**

• **Props/ real objects**

E

**ENCOURAGE &
ENGAGE IN
CONVERSATION**

**Opportunities
to talk**

**Familiar
topics**

**Some things
to avoid**

- **Make time for conversation**
 - Talk about **specific events** that may be remembered
 - Talk about **everyday things** like the weather or your breakfast

- Offer regular **reminders of the topic**:
 - You were telling me.....
 - We were speaking about...

- **Make it easy** for them to join in:
 - Ask YES/ NO questions
 - Ask CHOICE questions

- **Show others** how to include them in conversation

- **Minimise confusion** by
 - Maintaining **regular routines**
 - **Dropping in reminders** of:
 - Where they are
 - Who they are with
 - What is happening

- **Be tactful** if the same question is asked over and over. React as if hearing it for the first time.

This advice is based on the MESSAGE acronym, developed by
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A training video is also available at:

<https://youtu.be/jsyAQsdaLiE>



QR link to YouTube video