



Cognitive Impairment: Facilitating Communication

Cognitive impairment affects intellectual and social abilities to the point of making everyday life difficult. Among the main aspects affected are memory, language, judgment, sense of orientation, as well as the ability to recognize people, make decisions, and plan actions.

Any communication with a person with cognitive impairment will have its share of challenges. As a companion, you need to step back and see the whole picture to provide the elder with a positive experience, despite the difficulties. You must look beyond the impairment and connect through the heart. "Memory pulls us towards the past, but it is not essential for enjoying the present." Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber, journalist

We wish you pleasant reading and a good companionship journey!

Little Brothers

Communication guidelines

According to the Alzheimer Society, it is essential to maintain communication with a loved one living with a cognitive impairment, even in a limited way. Here are a few practical tips:

- Establish and maintain a warm and trusting environment;
- Keep in mind the effects of the disease on the behaviors of the person, be patient;
- Try to understand the meaning of the person's behaviors, maintain consistency and constancy;
- Adapt to the situation, and consult a professional, if necessary;
- Maintain the person's independence as long as possible;
- Share your experiences with specialized support groups, family and friends.

Source: <https://bit.ly/alzheimer-en>



Good practices

- Prepare for the visit (mentally and physically), expect the unexpected;
- Be aware that your own good mood will have a positive effect on the other person;
- Establish a "contact" routine and stick with it to make the person feel secure;
- Become aware of and adapt to sensory disabilities. If necessary, adapt the environment to ensure the person's safety;
- Show interest in the person's life history, encourage them to remember cherished and gratifying events from their past;
- Keep in mind that stories may not be accurate and true: accept the story as it is, without interrupting or pointing out inconsistencies, the person does not act this way on purpose;
- If necessary, try to change the subject or use humor to divert the discussion;
- Stay calm and sincere, be yourself;
- Seek help from specialists when challenges become too difficult.



Attitudes to adopt



- Keep in mind that your presence makes all the difference.
- Keep in mind the aspects over which you have control: the physical environment, "ambiance", possible activities, support from staff, friends and relatives;
- Identify your limits and make sure you respect them.
- Share your observations. As a volunteer, you are the eyes and ears of your organization. Stay in touch with your coordinator who is available to gather information about your companion's health and provide you with perspective and support for challenges you may encounter.
- As a caregiver, make sure you have access to support from professionals and plan respite periods to take care of yourself. Learn to let go of things that are non-essential.



Things to avoid

- Speaking for the person;
- Treating the person like a child;
- Questioning repeatedly;
- Getting caught up in details.

Additional resources

Telephone

Caregiver Support Helpline: 1 855 852-7784, every day from 8am to 8pm, or <https://www.lappui.org/en/>

Online

Little Brothers, *Factsheets: Complex Health Disorders*, <https://www.petitsfreres.ca/programmes/tcs/> (in French only)

CHUM, *Troubles de la mémoire et autres fonctions cognitives*, <https://bit.ly/CHUM-troubles-memoire> (in French only)

FOURNIER Édith et CARBONNEAU Michel, *Au-delà des mots : paroles de proches aidants*, [Série documentaire] <https://appui-audeladesmots.ca/> (in French only)

Reading

GENDRON Marie, *Le mystère Alzheimer*, Éd de L'homme, 2008.