Inappropriate caregiver approach is a common trigger for behaviors that we may see in dementia care. Individuals who have dementia respond to what they see or hear. Here are some tips to help you both enjoy the time you spend together.

When communicating with individuals who have dementia:

### Get Their Attention

Be sure you have their attention and they have their necessary (working) hearing aids when speaking to them. Turn off the T.V. or radio. Don’t try to compete with other environmental noise.

### Choose Your Words Carefully

Avoid words that whither, such as “Stop that!”,”Don’t do that!” Rather, redirect the individual by saying “Come with me...” or “Let’s go for a walk”, or “I need your help. Can you come with me?” Validate their feelings.

### Speak First

When initiating communication, you should begin by speaking to the individual. If this does not seem to work, use gestures plus speaking. For example, say “Come with me” at the same time you are beckoning them with your hand gesture. Finally, if all else fails, offer your hand for them to take and use touch. **Do Not Grab** someone’s arm first to get their attention. If something has caught their eye that you do not want them to see, then camouflage that object or remove it from their field of vision.

### Keep It Simple

1. Give one direction at a time and avoid long sentences. **For example**, “Sit down here” and tap the seat.
2...
3...

### Go Slowly

When approaching them, make sure you approach *slowly* from the front. Crouch down next to them if they are sitting in a wheelchair. Introduce yourself. Be careful not to startle.
Be Patient

Always give the individual time to respond to what you ask (including if this is during personal care). They may need time to register your request and then respond. Patience goes a long way!

Demonstrate Independence

In dementia care we always encourage independence as much as possible. If the person does not know how to feed themselves, then demonstrate the eating motion with a spoon or fork for them. If they still do not understand, then put your hand over their hand while they hold the spoon or fork and begin the motion of eating the food. Many times, once the rhythm is established, they will continue the motion and you can remove your hand.

Making Assumptions

Always assume the person can understand more than he/she can express. Never talk about them in front of them.

Be Mindful of Your Feelings

People with dementia are very sensitive to how you make them feel. If you are rushed or frustrated, they will pick up on this and express their frustration through a responsive behavior.

Remember… they may forget your name and role but they will never forget how you made them feel!

Other Resources

For more resources on communicating with individuals with dementia, visit the Alzheimer Society of Canada’s website: www.alzheimer.ca or telephone the local Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia at 902-422-7961.