



City & Hackney Dementia Alliance

Communication tips - dealing with someone with dementia over the phone

You may not know that a person has dementia or a memory problem from talking to them. However, you may notice that a person cannot find the right words to communicate what they are calling about, or they might seem confused or forgetful. These things alone do not mean that a person necessarily has dementia, but they could indicate that they would benefit from careful communication. These tips will benefit a wide range of callers, not just people living with dementia.

1. Try to find a quiet place to talk or reduce background noise if you can.
2. Get the person's full attention before you start- use their name.
3. Speak clearly and calmly.
4. Speak at a slightly slower pace and allow time between sentences for the person to process the information and respond. This might seem like an uncomfortable pause to you, but it is important for helping the person to communicate.
5. Avoid speaking sharply or raising your voice.
6. Use short, simple sentences for example: do you need medicine instead of 'medication'; food instead of 'essentials' etc.
7. Try to communicate with the person in a conversational way, not question after question (it can feel like an interrogation).
8. Do not talk to the person as you would to a young child – be patient and have respect for them.
9. Try to laugh together about misunderstandings and mistakes. However, be sensitive to the person and do not laugh at them.
10. Try to avoid asking too many questions, or complicated questions. People with dementia can become frustrated or withdrawn if they cannot find the answer.
11. Try to stick to one idea at a time. Giving someone a choice is important, but too many options can be confusing and frustrating.
12. If the person is finding it hard to understand, consider breaking down what you are saying into smaller chunks so that it is more manageable.
13. Ask questions one at a time, and phrase them in a way that allows for a 'yes' or 'no' answer.
14. Rephrase rather than repeat if the person does not understand what you are saying.
15. If the person says something you know is not true, try to find ways of steering the conversation around the subject, rather than contradicting them directly.