

Communicating Well with Dementia

Guidelines for supporting people with dementia in conversation



These communication support strategies were developed by people with dementia and their family carers that attend the day hospital here in St. Columcille's Hospital (SCH). They wanted to contribute to dementia education in SCH. These are the strategies that they find most helpful in conversation and ask that you too try to use them in your conversations with people with dementia.

1. Communication is much **more than words** it's important to focus on the tone, body language and feelings being expressed
2. **Allow time:** Time to talk and time to respond.
3. **Speak slowly:** this helps auditory processing and reduces pressure.
4. Don't ask questions that you know the answer to. Like "Where we are going today?" instead maybe you could say "I'm looking forward to our lunch out today, are you?"
5. One conversation at a time: keep it **one to one** where you can.
6. **Leave space** in the conversation, let the person with dementia initiate and lead the conversation where possible.
7. **Signal breakdown:** if either person in the conversation loses track, say so and try to clarify the message or meaning
8. Appreciation of silence, "**Silence is Golden**", all sorts of comments, communications and experiences can evolve when we are still.

We all enjoy a good chat and quality time talking with friends and family. We can support the conversation of people with dementia, by taking time to think about how we communicate. Conversation is a two-way process.