

# Eight Tips for Talking to Someone with Dementia

Talking to a loved one – especially a parent – with Alzheimer's disease or another type of dementia can be tough. If they were diagnosed recently, you both may be dealing with emotions. And if they have been sick for a while, you may feel like you never know how lucid they'll be. Will they ask the same question over and over? Will they get frustrated trying to talk with you?

Although you can never predict exactly how a conversation will go, here are eight tips to help you talk to your loved one with dementia.

## Learn More About Dementia

Dementia is almost always progressive. This means that it will get worse over time. And different types of dementia have different symptoms. It's important to take time to learn about your loved one's disease to help you understand the condition, its symptoms, and its progression. That way, you'll be able to anticipate changes and have a better idea of what to expect. And if your loved one has questions about their diagnosis, you'll be able to provide accurate answers. To get started, consider talking about various [dementia vocab words](#) you might hear during doctor's appointments.

## Discuss What's Next

Sometimes, people who receive a dementia diagnosis already had a feeling that something was wrong. Their diagnosis may help them understand the changes they've been experiencing and can sometimes actually be reassuring. Outline the next steps that you and your loved one can take together. These steps might

include scheduling a doctor's appointment, seeking further medical evaluation, or exploring treatment options. Other steps might be [advance care planning](#) and thinking about updates they might need to make to their finances or legal documents.

## Consider Time and Place

Where you have conversations with your loved one can set the mood and tone. Find a quiet, comfortable place where you can talk without interruptions. Choose a time when both of you are relatively calm and not rushed. Avoid late afternoon or evening, if your loved one experiences sundowning (a type of agitation common this time of day).

## Process Your Feelings Separately

Caring for someone with dementia can bring up strong emotions. Your loved one's diagnosis will [change your caregiver role](#) and may make you feel sad, confused, or overwhelmed. You may experience [anticipatory grief](#) – and your loved one may as well. They may feel scared or angry as things that were once easy become more and more difficult. Trying to support your loved one while dealing with your own feelings can be tricky. Before starting a conversation with your loved one, give yourself time to understand your own feelings. That way, when you talk to your loved one, you will be more focused on their needs and emotions.

## Answer Endless Questions

Someone who has dementia might ask a lot of questions – or ask the same question over and over again, often forgetting that they already asked it. If your loved one seems stuck in a question loop, try to identify the underlying emotions – anxiety or fear might be driving their questions. Although the

constant questions might be annoying, be patient and try to provide short, simple answers. It can also be helpful to distract your loved one with an easy activity.

## **Try to Maintain Empathy and Support**

When talking to a loved one who has dementia, it can be hard to avoid becoming frustrated by their behaviors. Their emotions, reactions, and behaviors may not come from obvious places. Try to remember that they may be scared, either because they know what's coming or because they no longer understand what's happening. Know that your loved one isn't doing things on purpose to frustrate you.

## **Meet Your Loved One Where They Are**

As your loved one's dementia progresses, they may not just forget things – they may also entirely misremember events, places, or people. Do your best to meet them where they are. It can be reassuring to them if you sometimes enter into their world with them – try to see it, remember it, or imagine it as they see it. Depending on the progression of their disease, this might be more comforting to them than being corrected.

## **Listen and Encourage Open Communication**

Let your loved one know that it's important for them to talk openly about their feelings, concerns, and questions. Assure them that you are there to listen, provide comfort, and help them navigate the challenges ahead.

Having a conversation with someone with dementia can be challenging – especially when you love them. From your own feelings to your loved one's reaction, opening the lines of communication can feel like a big responsibility. By taking

time to learn more about their condition and the communication skills to help you talk about it, you can feel more confident, and your loved one can feel more comfortable in your conversation.