

## ENHANCING INDEPENDENCE

People with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia find satisfaction and fulfillment in doing the familiar things they have done throughout their lives. As the disease progresses, the person's abilities change and they will need additional support to carry out familiar tasks. Care providers can enhance the independence of a person with dementia through careful communication and cueing.

### Guidelines for Promoting Independence

- 1. Focus on the person's continuing abilities** – if a person's abilities appear to have changed, it may be that they are finding it difficult to get started in the activity – not that they have lost the skill. Try to find ways to accommodate the person so that they can continue to do as much as they are able for as long as possible.
- 2. Continue a familiar lifestyle** – the person with dementia may find long held patterns from their personal and work life easy to continue. If these patterns are interrupted, the person must begin to think about the steps of an activity and may become discouraged or frustrated.
- 3. Plan for the person to succeed** – doing things should not be a test of the person's abilities but an opportunity to feel accomplishment and find pleasure. Engage the person to do the portion of a task where they can experience success.
- 4. Provide opportunities for the person to make decisions** – continue to provide the person with choices. These may include clothing for the day, menu selection or whether and how they will do an activity. To assist the person in their choice, provide the options in the question or show them the things they can choose between.
- 5. Explain things every time** – instead of assuming that the person recalls the steps of an activity, explain the steps each time they are doing the activity.
- 6. Allow plenty of time** – it takes longer for the person with dementia to process information and take action. When communicating with the person, allow time for them to think about the message of the words before repeating the information. If repeating the message, use the same words as used the first time.
- 7. Provide the appropriate level of cueing** – break the task into manageable steps, adapt the task to fit the strengths of the person and choose the level of cueing that provides just enough assistance to ensure success. Both too much and too little assistance can lead to declines in ability, creating excess disability. Too much assistance can lead to the person allowing others to do things for them. Too little support can lead to frustration and failure, causing the person to stop trying to do things. When a person is supported by care providers and an environment that encourages participation, ability and function are maintained.

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## Approaches When Abilities Fluctuate:

A person with dementia may experience times when their abilities fluctuate because of changes in their personal health or comfort with their surroundings. Those who provide care to the person need to capitalize on the times when function is best. People with dementia are often more able early in the day when they are well rested, when their surroundings are less busy and when their health is good. Care providers are reminded to act sensitively when the person with dementia cannot do something they had been able to do previously. The person with dementia is not choosing to be uncooperative – their behaviour is a response to the changes the disease is causing.

## Cueing – An Effective Care Strategy

Cueing is a verbal or nonverbal strategy used to give a person information about how they might interact with others or their surroundings. Often more than one cueing technique is used in combination to increase the ease with which a person will be able to understand messages.

- 1. Verbal Support:** When speaking with a person with dementia, remember to use social courtesies (e.g., please and thank you), discuss one topic at a time in short, simple sentences and add gestures and body language that reinforce the message being spoken. When the person has responded to the message, reinforce their action with appreciation.
- 2. Environmental Support:** Labeling of articles or storage spaces can assist a person with dementia in identifying an object, the place in which it is stored and its use. Use words consistent with the way the person would recall the object in their long-term memory. If using pictorial labels, use clear realistic images. The senses of sight and smell are also powerful cues. By reducing surrounding clutter, visual cues become more obvious, and the person can more easily determine the intended message.
- 3. “Hands-on” Support:** When giving “hands-on” support, try to approach the situation as a friend rather than as someone who appears to be supervising the activity. The following are ways of giving “hands-on” support:

Modeling	Bridging	Chaining	Hand-over-hand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The care provider demonstrates to the person the task to be done.</li> </ul> <p>Example: Sit beside the person to eat your meal as they are eating their meal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The care provider places an object that is similar to the article that will be used in the person’s hand; the object serves as a link to the assistance that the care provider will be giving.</li> </ul> <p>Example: Have a man hold a razor while you are giving him a shave. To increase the sensory bridge, turn the razor on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The caregiver initiates the activity for the person, and then encourages the person to take over the activity.</li> </ul> <p>Example: To assist a person to begin eating, place the spoon into the bowl of food. Do not scoop the food or assist with the first bite unless the person does not take over the activity when given enough time and encouragement to do so.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The care provider places their hand over the hand of the person receiving care and guides the person through the activity; be careful not to force the person’s motion when using this technique.</li> <li>This technique is particularly effective in promoting dignity in hygiene activities.</li> </ul> <p>Example: When assisting a person to exercise, place your hand over their hand and move their arm gently through the range of motion desired.</p>

By using careful communication and cueing, care providers of people with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia can preserve the person's dignity while helping them to use their strengths to carry out familiar tasks.

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