

# **MESSAGE**

**Communication  
strategies in dementia**

**and**

# **RECAPS**

**Memory strategies in  
dementia**



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# MESSAGE

## *Communication strategies in dementia*

**MESSAGE** is a set of strategies designed to facilitate effective communication with people with dementia.

Effective communication is important to help maintain a person's self-esteem and quality of life.

This section provides a handy summary of the important points for each **MESSAGE** strategy.

**Developed by: Helen Chenery, Erin Smith, Rosemary Baker and Anthony Angwin**



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## M - MAXIMISE Attention

### 1. *Attract attention*

- Address the person by name
- Move to his/her eye level
- Maintain eye contact

### 2. *Avoid distraction*

Limit external distractions by turning off the TV or radio, or moving to a quieter place.

### 3. *One at a time*

- Try to make sure that only one person talks at a time
- Try not to hold other conversations when talking to a person with dementia



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## E - EXPRESSION and Body Language

### 1. *Relaxed and calm*

- Be aware of your facial expression, tone of voice, and body language when talking to a person with dementia
- Try to appear as relaxed and calm as possible

### 2. *Show interest*

- Use your body language to show that you are interested
- Face the person, lean forwards and nod your head when appropriate



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## S - Keep it SIMPLE

### 1. *Short, simple & familiar*

- Use short, simple and direct sentences
- Use familiar words
- Use nouns and names, rather than pronouns (like 'he', 'she', or 'it')

You can use simple language without talking down to someone.

### 2. *Clear choices*

Help the person express needs or wants by offering clear choices:

- Use questions with yes or no answers
- Suggest choices (e.g. 'Would you like water or tea?')
- In the later stages, you may need to limit questions to one choice with a yes or no answer (e.g. 'Would you like chicken?')



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## **S - SUPPORT their conversation**

### **1. Give them time**

- Communication is harder if a person is feeling rushed so give him/her extra time
- A good rule is to wait 5 seconds after you have finished speaking before you expect a response

### **2. Find the word**

There are several ways you can help the person find the right word:

- Suggest a word
- Repeat the unfinished sentence with a suitable word in place
- Ask 'Do you mean \_\_\_\_?'

### **3. Repeat then rephrase**

If he/she doesn't seem to understand what you have said:

- First, try repeating your sentence
- If that doesn't work, say the sentence in a different way

### **4. Reminders of the topic**

- Clearly mention the topic of your conversation
- Repeat the topic throughout the conversation
- Make it clear when you are changing the topic, by mentioning the topic change or leave time between topics

## A - ASSIST with visual AIDS

### 1. *Gesture & action*

Use gestures (pointing or actions) when speaking to help clarify what you are saying.

### 2. *Objects & pictures*

Use visuals as well as speech, by showing:

- The object you are talking about
- A picture of the object or topic
- Written words (if the person is able to read)

Use visuals instead of speaking when people are having greater difficulty understanding words. Showing them familiar objects or actions can trigger understanding when words fail.



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## **G - GET their message**

### **1. Listen, watch & work out**

**Pay attention to words and nonverbal clues - you may need to use both to work out the person's message.**

### **2. Behaviour & nonverbal messages**

**The person with dementia may communicate through his/her behaviour:**

- **Facial expression or where the person is looking can give you information**
- **Be familiar with the person's life, likes, dislikes, interests and routines. This may help you decipher his/her messages.**



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## E - ENCOURAGE and ENGAGE in communication

### 1. *Interesting & familiar topics*

Encourage conversation about familiar and interesting things, such as:

- Photos
- Memorabilia

Write people's names and other details on the photos, so that other people can talk about them with the person.

### 2. *Family & friends*

- Encourage conversation whenever you get the chance, and encourage family and friends to do the same
- Don't ask test questions
- Don't argue if the person seems confused about reality. Instead, acknowledge his/her feelings, give reassurance if needed, and try to move on gently to another topic.



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## **LET'S SUMMARISE...**

### **MESSAGE**

#### **M- MAXIMISE attention**

- 1. Attract attention**
- 2. Avoid distractions**
- 3. One at a time**

#### **E- Watch your EXPRESSION and body language**

- 1. Relaxed & calm**
- 2. Show interest**

#### **S- Keep it SIMPLE**

- 1. Short, simple & familiar**
- 2. Clear choices**

#### **S- SUPPORT their conversation**

- 1. Give them time**
- 2. Find the word**
- 3. Repeat then rephrase**
- 4. Reminders of the topic**

#### **A- ASSIST with visual AIDS**

- 1. Gesture & actions**
- 2. Objects & pictures**

#### **G- GET their message**

- 1. Listen, watch & work out**
- 2. Behaviour & nonverbal messages**

#### **E- ENCOURAGE and ENGAGE in communication**

- 1. Interesting & familiar topics**
- 2. Family & friends**

**We acknowledge the following MESSAGE sources:**

*The FOCUSED Program: A communication guide for Alzheimer's Disease.* Developed by Danielle N. Ripich (1996). With the kind permission of Professor Ripich.

Alzheimer's Australia Victoria, *Effective communication in Alzheimer's Disease* (DVD), © 2006.

# RECAPS

## *Memory strategies in dementia*

RECAPS is a set of strategies that aims to maximize the day-to-day memory skills of people with dementia.

This section contains a summary of the important points for each RECAPS strategy.

**Developed by: Helen Chenery, Michael Humphreys, Nancy Pachana, Leander Mitchell, Erin Smith, Rosemary Baker, Katharine Vearncombe and Kyra Hucker**

## R - REMINDERS

### 1. *Spoken prompts*

- Give verbal reminders of things the person with dementia needs to do or take
- Remind him/her of people's names

### 2. *Written word & picture reminders*

- Use signs on doors and cupboards (word + photo)
- Put a 'reminder centre' in a common area with a notebook and pen, diary or calendar, and whiteboard or pin-board
- Start a visitors' book so that family and other visitors can write when they came, what they said, and when they are coming back



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## E - ENVIRONMENT

### 1. *Have a permanent place for objects*

- Keep items you use every day in their places (e.g. a basket for reading glasses)
- Always put things back in the same place to help the person find them more easily
- Use pictures and labels to remind the person where things go

### 2. *Don't change surroundings*

Avoid making changes to the surroundings unless it is absolutely necessary.



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## C - CONSISTENT Routines

### 1. *Keep up familiar routines*

Be consistent:

- Get ready or do things in the same order every time
- Have things happen at around the same time each day
- Do things on the same day each week

### 2. *Make routines if you don't have them*

If you don't already have routines try incorporating them into everyday life.



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# A - ATTENTION

## 1. *Avoid distractions*

Limit distractions (TV or radio) so that the person can take in new information.

## 2. *Focus attention*

- Bring the item in question into the person's line of vision
- Try to get eye contact when you are explaining something



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## **P - PRACTICE**

### **1. *Maintain skills through use***

- Encourage the person to carry out tasks and activities that he/she has always done
- Give him/her the chance to carry out tasks from start to finish, and try not to take over
- Help the person to continue by using reminders
- Modify the task so that the person can continue to contribute

### **2. *Practise new skills***

**When the person needs to learn something new:**

- Provide opportunities to practise
- Practise as often as you can (but not over and over) - leave some time between practices and try to keep practice natural
- Use the same prompts and reminders each time you practise

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## S - SIMPLE STEPS

### 1. *Break into simple steps*

- Break tasks into simple steps
- Try to give one simple instruction at a time
- You may also need to give reminders about the order of the steps

### 2. *Allow extra time*

- It may take longer for the person to do things
- Give plenty of time, and don't hurry them



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## **LET'S SUMMARISE...**

### **RECAPS**

#### **R - Reminders**

- 1. Spoken prompts**
- 2. Written word & picture reminders**

#### **E - Environment**

- 1. Have a permanent place for objects**
- 2. Don't change surroundings**

#### **C - Consistent Routines**

- 1. Keep up familiar routines**
- 2. Make routines**

#### **A - Attention**

- 1. Avoid distractions**
- 2. Focus attention**

#### **P - Practice**

- 1. Maintain skills through use**
- 2. Practise new skills**

#### **S - Simple Steps**

- 1. Break into simple steps**
- 2. Allow extra time**

**We acknowledge the following RECAPS sources:**

Alzheimer's Australia Victoria, *Understanding memory changes: Normal ageing or dementia?* (DVD), © 2002.

Wiles, J. & Wiles, J. (2003). *The Memory Book*. Sydney, NSW: ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

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