TALKING TO PEOPLE WITH MEMORY LOSS

COMMUNICATION
INFORMATION YOU CAN USE FROM THE BENJAMIN ROSE INSTITUTE

BENJAMIN ROSE INSTITUTE

For nearly a century, BRI has worked to raise the standards of care for older adults. Founded in 1908 as a nonsectarian organization through the generosity of Cleveland industrialist Benjamin Rose, the Institute has been an innovator in service delivery, a leader in research, and an advocate for the elderly in Northeast Ohio and nationally. Supported by an endowment fund, grants, fees for services, and gifts, BRI assists older people and their families through collaborative efforts and through its:

- Eldercare Services Institute
- Margaret Blenkner Research Institute
- Katz Policy Institute
- Margaret Wagner Apartments

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–CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH MEMORY LOSS CAN BE VERY DEMANDING.

THESE TIPS MAY HELP YOU IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR FRIEND OR RELATIVE AND MAKE YOUR TIME TOGETHER MORE ENJOYABLE FOR BOTH OF YOU.
People with Alzheimer’s disease and other memory disorders often have trouble communicating and understanding what other people are saying to them. As the disorder progresses, the person’s ability to communicate gets worse.

As a family member or friend, it’s important to learn how to speak and listen to an older adult whose memory is failing. Everyday conversations help the person with Alzheimer’s stay involved in daily life. They can also let you know if he or she feels hungry, ill, sad, confused or upset.

Be as patient and pleasant as possible when talking to your loved one. Caring for someone with a memory disorder can be highly stressful. If you find yourself getting angry with the person with dementia, leave the room and take a break until you calm down. Anger can be very upsetting to people with memory disorders.

**COMMUNICATION TIPS**

- Speak slowly and clearly. Use simple words and short sentences. Repeat things when necessary.
- Maintain eye contact – especially if the person is hard of hearing.
- Ask questions one at a time. Allow lots of time for answers. Avoid “why” questions.
- Be cheerful.
- Don’t “talk down” to the person.
- Nonverbal communication — pointing, touching, smiling, hugging – can bring you and your relative closer.
- Never argue. Neither of you will win. Arguing will only make both of you feel sad.
- Limit choices. Ask “Do you want tea or coffee?” not “What do you want to drink?”
- Be patient and understanding.
- Don’t discuss your relative with others when he or she is present.
- Enjoy simple pleasures together: Take a walk, watch the sun set, listen to music.

**HEARING LOSS**

Many older adults suffer from hearing loss as well as memory loss. If your relative does not hear well:

- Stand in front of him or her when you speak.
- Attract attention with a gentle touch or by saying the person’s name.
- Speak slowly and clearly in a low tone of voice.
- Pointing, gesturing and touching are often helpful.