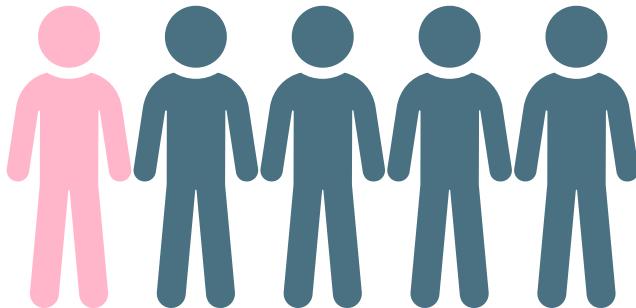


Communication and Approach in Dementia Care

e4 PEOPLE



Effective communication is essential in dementia care. It allows us to connect with individuals, meet their needs, and improve their overall quality of life. Understanding the challenges and adapting our approach is key to building positive, meaningful connections.

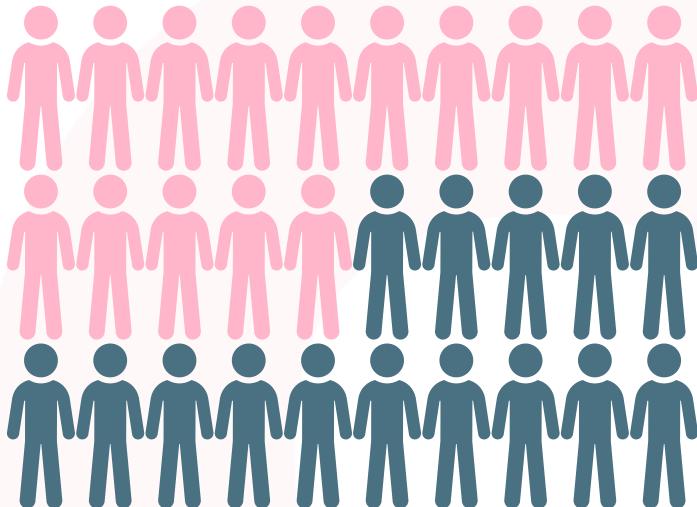


1 in 5

people in Australia speak a language other than English

2,500,000

more people in Australia speak a language other than English in 2021, compared to 2006



Building Connections in Dementia Care

Why Do We Communicate?

Communication helps us:

- Express thoughts, emotions, and needs.
- Build relationships and maintain social connections.
- Share information and solve problems.
- Learn new skills and follow instructions.

Basic Communication Model

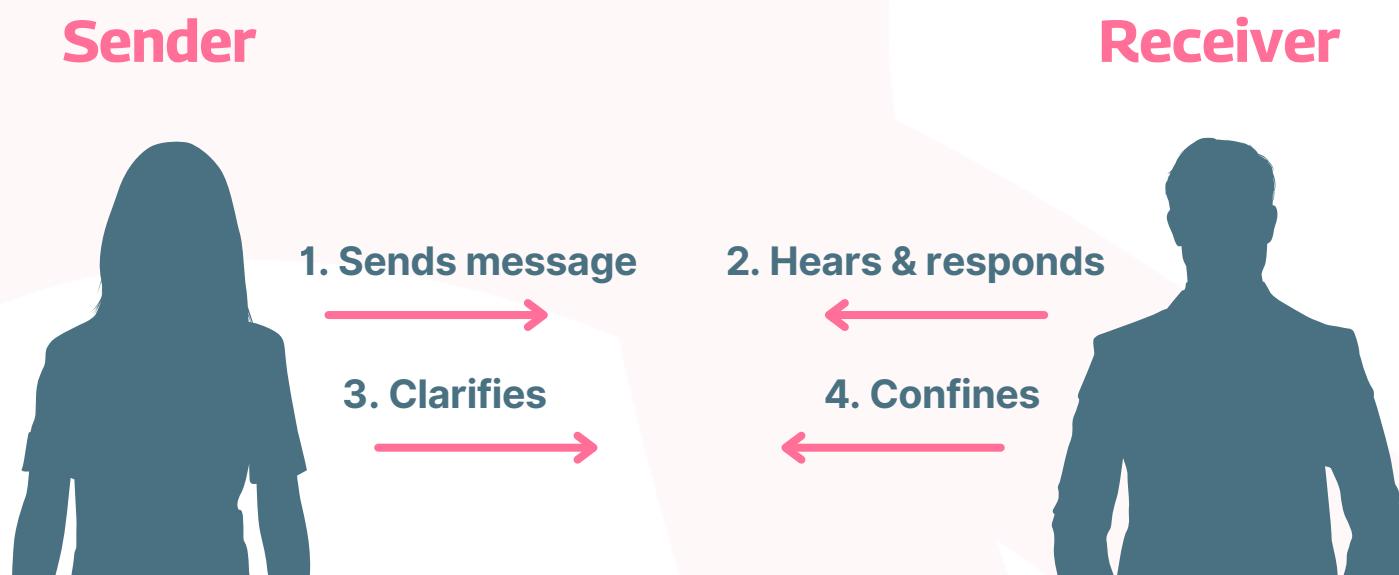
- **Sender:** Shares a verbal or non-verbal message in a way that is clear and understandable.
- **Receiver:** Hears and interprets the message, providing a response.



Common Barriers to Communication in Dementia

People living with dementia can experience various communication barriers, such as:

- Difficulty expressing emotions.
- Failing to respond when spoken to.
- Fluent speaking without making sense.
- Trouble finding words.
- Interrupting or responding inappropriately.
- Misinterpreting meanings or concepts.
- Reverting to their first language, which may happen when stressed, tired, or as dementia progresses.
- Sensory changes: hearing or visual loss makes recognising people harder.
- Repeating themselves.
- Short temper, distraction, or overwhelm.
- Frustration due to misunderstandings may lead to changed behaviour.



Factors Impacting Communication

Several factors affect the ability to communicate effectively:

- **Sensory Loss:** Hearing or vision difficulties.
- **Distracting Noise and Movement:** Overwhelming environments.
- **Feelings, Mood or Emotional State:** Pain, fatigue, or dehydration.
- **Health Conditions:** Overall physical health influences communication.
- **Language Differences:** Speaking another language or reverting to the first language.
- **Environment:** Factors like lighting and surrounding noise.
- **Staff Approach:** The way staff interact with individuals, including facial expressions, tone of voice, and sensitivity.
- **Cultural Differences:** Personal norms about touch, personal space, and interactions.
- **Past Experiences:** Trauma, accent, sociocultural influences on communication style.
- **Technological Challenges:** Difficulty using devices like hearing aids or phones.

Effective Communication and Approach

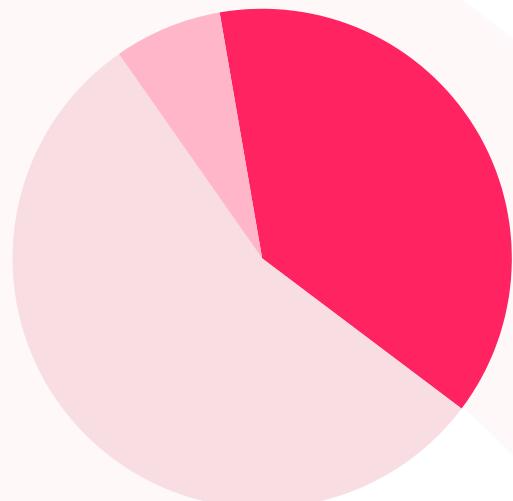
Avoid Confusion:

- Avoid slang or regional terminology that might be unfamiliar (e.g., "dunny" instead of "toilet").
- Use simple and specific language – proper nouns (like "John" or "Mary") instead of pronouns (like "he" or "she").

38-55-7 Rule

The way we communicate is composed of:

- **38% tone of voice:** pitch, volume, and emotional tone.
- **55% non-verbal cues:** body language, facial expressions, posture.
- **7% actual words:** what is said.



Practical Communication Approaches

Practical tips to enhance communication and reduce distress:

- **Use names:** Call someone by their name rather than using pronouns (e.g., "Would you like a blanket, Mary?" instead of "Do you want one?").
- **Visual cues:** Use gestures, pointing, and pictures to clarify communication.
- **Avoid correcting or quizzing:** Validating their current feelings is more helpful than correcting or embarrassing them.
- **For sensory changes:**
 - Check that hearing aids and glasses are in use.
 - Face the person directly to help them read facial expressions and lips.
 - Avoid standing behind them.
 - Reduce background noise, improve lighting, and avoid glare.
- **Minimise environmental distractions:** Ensure adequate lighting and eliminate overwhelming noise. Use familiar items and maintain a consistent routine.
- **Watch medication effects:** Provide proper care after medications are administered to address sedation or confusion. Report concerns to clinical staff.
- **Regularly check the individual's health status:** Ensure hydration and nutrition, monitor pain or physical discomfort, and avoid lengthy and complex communication.

The 5 S's for Effective Communication

SLOW

Speak slowly and give time for responses.

SIMPLE

Use short sentences and one idea at a time.

SPECIFIC

Use clear terms and names instead of ambiguous words or pronouns.

SHOW

Point to objects, use gestures, and show choices (e.g., physically show the cardigan if asking about outfits).

SMILE

A smile can communicate warmth and trust even when verbal understanding is limited.

Assistive Technology for Communication

Available tools and aids can support communication with people living with dementia:

- Picture and symbol-based communication boards.
- Voice-activated smart assistants.
- Text-to-speech and speech-to-text apps.
- Wearable alert systems.
- Personalised memory aids.
- Translation apps and devices to navigate language barriers.



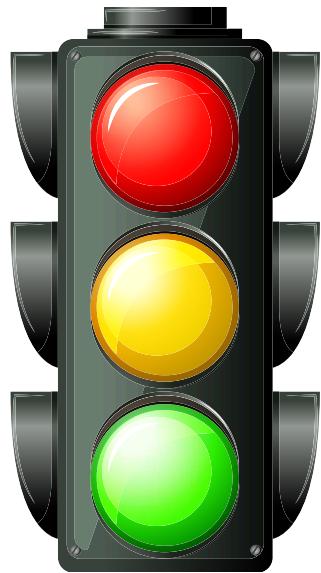
Space and Proximity in Communication

Different spaces influence how we approach interactions with someone:



- Intimate space:**
Less than 0.45m – close contact.
- Personal space:**
0.45m-1.2m – personal interactions.
- Social space:**
1.2m-3.6m – casual exchanges.
- Public space:**
3.6m-7.6m – formal or group presentations.

Traffic Light System:



Red

Distressed: Stop and provide space. Remain calm and respond with positive body language.

Amber

Restless: Acknowledge feelings, apologise if needed, and help address unmet needs.

Green

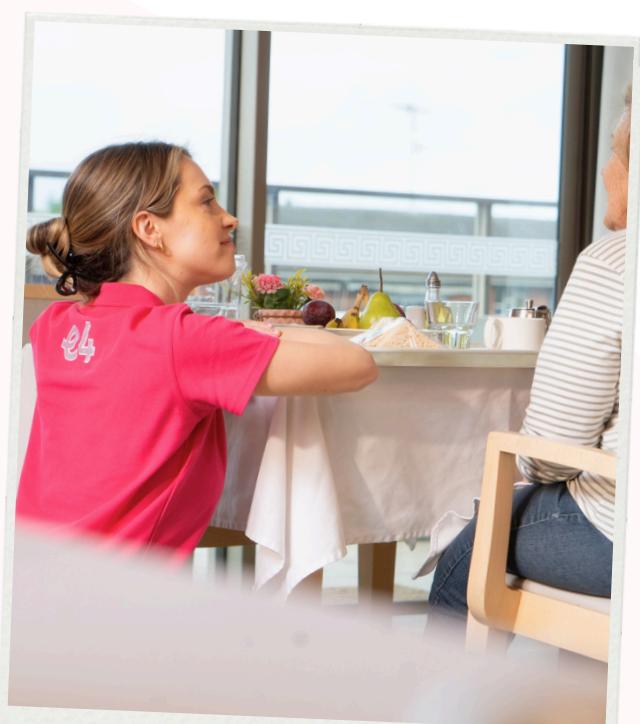
Calm: Interact, engage, and maintain connection positively.

Incorporating Life Stories into Everyday Activities

Using a person's life story can improve communication and foster connections.

Examples:

- **During personal care:** Adhere to familiar routines, talk about life stories, and use preferred music or singing as a diversion.
- **During meals:** Provide favourite meals, chat about preferred foods, and use sensory engagement.
- **Engaging in household tasks:** Encourage involvement with simple chores before or after meals or activities.



Key Takeaways

Simple changes in communication and approach can profoundly impact the experience of those living with dementia.

Use names:

- Introduce yourself every time.
- Use a calm tone and speak at eye level.
- Find their unmet needs and validate emotions.
- Offer choices – never dictate.
- Smile often and be kind.

If nothing else, remember this:

Being present, patient, and kind transforms the care you provide to someone living with dementia.