Alzheimer’s Care: Person Centered Strategies for Communication and Challenging Behaviors
Mariam Schrage
Senior Associate Director,
Contact Center Operations
Alzheimer’s Association
Mission:

To **eliminate Alzheimer’s disease** through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.
Communication changes throughout the disease
Early Stage (Mild)

• Convey thoughts and feelings through language
• Able to make decisions about future care
• May misinterpret what others say
• Difficulty finding the right words
• Taking longer to speak or respond
• Withdrawing from conversations
• Struggle with decision-making or problem solving
Communication in the early stage

To connect:

• Ask directly how to help with communication
• Keep sentences clear and straightforward
• Leave plenty of time for conversations
• Include the person in conversations that affect him or her, including planning for the future
Communication in the early stage

Keep in mind:

• Avoid making assumptions
• Speak directly to the person
• Communicate in the way that is most comfortable for the person
• Laugh together, be honest, and stay connected
Middle Stage (Moderate)

- Rely more on tone of voice, facial expression and body language
- Continue to need emotional connection and meaningful activity
- Increased difficulty finding the right words or even inventing new words to describe familiar things
- Speaking less frequently
- Communicating through behavior rather than words
Communication in the middle stage

To connect:

• Approach from the front, say who you are and call the person by name
• Maintain eye contact and get at eye level if seated or reclining
• Avoid criticizing, correcting and arguing
• Pay attention to your tone
• Take your time
Communication in the middle stage

Keep respect and empathy in your mind, then:

• Join the person’s reality
• Assess the person’s needs
• Let the person know you hear his or her concerns whether they are expressed through words, behavior, or both
• Provide a brief answer
• Respond to the emotions behind the statement
Communication in the middle stage

To connect, keep it slow and basic:

• Use short sentences and basic words
• Speak slowly and clearly, one person and one question at a time
• Limit distractions
• Be patient
• Put answers into your questions
Late Stage (Severe)

• May still respond to familiar words, phrases or songs
• Communication is reduced to a few words or sounds
• Use body language and the five senses to connect
Communication in the late stage

To connect:

• Listen for expressions of pain and respond promptly
• Help the person feel safe and happy
• Continue to bring respect to each conversation
• Keep talking
• Use all five senses to communicate
Behavioral Changes
Triggers

- Pain or discomfort
- Over-stimulation or boredom
- Fear or frustration
- Unfamiliar surroundings
- Complicated tasks
Understanding and addressing the behavior

- Detect and connect
- Address physical needs first
- Then address emotional needs
- Reassess and plan for next time
Aggression

- May be verbal or physical
- May occur suddenly with no apparent reason or result from a frustrating situation
- Usually is upsetting but not dangerous
- When the person is a danger to themselves or others, safety measures are necessary
Aggression

Possible causes:

• Physical discomfort
• Environmental factors
• Poor communication
Aggression

How to respond:

• Try to identify cause
• Rule out pain
• Focus on feelings, not facts
• Don’t get upset
• Limit distractions
• Shift focus to another activity
• Speak with the person’s doctor about medical interventions
• Call 911 when help is urgently needed
Repetition

• Includes repeating a word, question, or activity or undoing something that was just finished

• Typically occurs because person is looking for comfort, security and familiarity
Repetition

Possible causes:

• Deterioration of brain cells
• May not remember that she or he has just asked a question or completed a task
• Environmental influences can cause or make worse
Repetition

How to respond:

• Look for a reason behind the repetition
• Focus on the emotion, not the behavior
• Turn the action or behavior into an activity
• Stay calm and be patient
• Provide an answer
• Engage the person in an activity
• Use memory aids
• Accept behavior and work with it
RESOURCES: ALZHEIMER’S ASSOCIATION
Working with people living with dementia and their families
The Alzheimer’s Association is here all day, every day for people facing Alzheimer’s disease through our free 24/7 Helpline 800.272.3900. Visit our website at alz.org.
Highly qualified Helpline team

- Helpline Specialists provide disease information, caregiver education, referral to local resources, triage complex calls to care consultants
- Masters prepared Care Consultants provide: problem-solving, care planning, crisis assessment and intervention
- 100+ hours new-hire training in classroom & hands-on
- Clinical supervision weekly
- On-going in-service training
- Quality monitoring, 1:1 coaching
The Alzheimer’s Association offers free **online** and **in-person** education sessions for those living with the disease and their caregivers.

[alz.org/education](http://alz.org/education)
Online Resources: Caregiver Center

Resources for:

• Personal care
• Medical care
• Behaviors
• Safety issues
• Care options
• Legal & financial planning

www.alz.org/care
ALZConnected®, powered by the Alzheimer's Association®, is a free online community for everyone affected by Alzheimer’s or another dementia.

alzconnected.org
Community Resource Finder

• Access comprehensive lists of resources, services and community programs (including ADRC’s, AAA’s)
• Search by category and proximity
• Sort by specific needs and preferences
• www.communityresourcefinder.org
Online Resources: Safety Center

- Wandering
- Creating a safe home environment
- Driving
- Medication Safety
- Technology
- Traveling
- MedicAlert + Safe Return®
- Disaster
- www.alz.org/safety
Questions??

Thank you!!

Mariam Schrage
mschrage@alz.org
312-604-1658