

Worksheet 4:

Common Core Principles for Supporting People with Dementia – Principle 3

Produced jointly by Skills for Care and Skills for Health, the ‘Common Core Principles for Supporting People with Dementia’ can be used to support better understanding and practice for anyone supporting a person with dementia in any domestic, health or social care setting. Principle 3 states that we should:

“Communicate sensitively to support meaningful interaction.”

Context

Dementia may affect a person’s ability to understand and use language accurately and appropriately. This is often seen as difficulty with remembering words or using them accurately, repetition of thoughts and lack of coherence. As the condition progresses, communication can become increasingly difficult.

This is likely to vary from day to day and requires everyone supporting a person with dementia to respond and adapt their communication. It is important to remember that other conditions and disabilities may also affect people’s ability to communicate (e.g. learning disability).

Indicative behaviours that should be demonstrated by everyone supporting a person with dementia:

- Always make time for people with dementia and remain patient in every situation
- Make use of the person’s past experiences and life story to support communicating with them
- Take into account a person’s usual communication skills and background culture
- Try to keep the environment as calm and as quiet as possible when communicating, allowing plenty of time to have conversations
- Always face the person in conversation and be reassuring in your expressions, tone of voice and words, to reduce frustration

When speaking, we must:

- Speak clearly using short sentences – don’t give too much information or ask too many questions
- Use simple vocabulary and avoid jargon
- Remember that it takes time for people with dementia to take in a question, find the right words and frame the reply; don’t use more explanations as this will cause more confusion — just wait

- Try not to finish a person's sentence unless you are asked to do so
- Try to avoid negative statements such as “don't...”; instead try to reinforce positive behaviour
- Remember to monitor your tone of voice carefully
- Enjoy interacting together and use humour to communicate this pleasure

Everyone who may support a person with dementia should have an understanding that:

- Repetitive questions from people with dementia can be challenging – try to respond as though it is the first time you have heard the question
- Whatever is said to you, it is best to accept it and not argue
- You may need to frame any questions so the person can answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in specific situations – but avoid using this technique extensively
- Listen carefully to grasp the meaning and tone of the person's conversation
- You should use non-verbal communication such as gesture, facial expression and writing
- Take account of any hearing or visual problems or second language difficulties
- You can use images, pictures, symbols or music to enhance communication and facilitate understanding
- If the person is already receiving other services, communication should be undertaken according to any communication guidelines that have been already developed to support the person (e.g. in their care plan)