



Validation Training Institute, Inc.

Connecting heart to heart with older adults
a non-profit, tax exempt company

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Tips from VTI for Caregivers of People Living with Dementia Part 2

Building off of our first 3 tips, here are some next steps:

EXPLORE RATHER THAN TELL

Disoriented older adults are often in a personal reality rather than our reality. Let your goal be: I want to know more about their world. Use open questions to find out more. Ask questions that begin with: who, what, where, when, how but don't ask why. Why questions ask for insight into reasons that are more cognitive than emotive. Many disoriented older adults need to express emotions. By engaging in their reality, you validate them as people.

TRY EMPATHY INSTEAD OF DIVERSION OR LYING

When a person is expressing a lot of emotion (like anger, sadness or fear) it does not help to say, "Don't feel that way." You know that from your own experiences. When someone says, "Don't be angry," how does that make YOU feel? More angry perhaps? Or maybe you intuitively understand that the other person doesn't understand or want to understand and it would be better to simply swallow your emotion. That is exactly what happens with older adults! You don't need to use your intellect, use your heart. Connect with the emotion the other person is expressing and match it. This will bring you closer to the other person and create a bond.

APPROACH THE OTHER PERSON WITH RESPECT

Make sure you are on eye-level (that means kneeling or bending if the older adult is sitting).

Be aware of the distance between you and look for signs that you are too close or too far away.

A person will 'retreat' by pulling back his shoulders or crossing his arms (for example) when you are too close. A person will not acknowledge you if you are too far away.

It's a smart idea to get eye contact first – then start talking.

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At this strange time, filled with great difficulties for many people, it's important to remember

CENTERING

- Centering will help you not hook into the anxiety that is prevalent by helping you find your own emotional center.
- Centering will help you put aside your own feelings for the moments you want to connect with older adults.
- Centering will help you find empathy.
- Centering can also be 3 minutes of self-care.

[VTI's YouTube Channel](#) is a free resource for everyone. It includes 3 'How-to... center' videos in English, Italian, French, German, Swedish and Chinese. Feel free to send these to everyone you know who would benefit from it. If they are not in your language, please contact me and we'll work on getting all 6 'How-to...' videos up in your language.

SELF-CARE

This is not a luxury item, this is a basic human need even though it doesn't show up on Maslow's list. If you don't have energy (physically or psychologically), you can't give good care to others. Self-care means finding the things that GIVE you energy. Is it a bath? ½ hour reading a book? Listening to your favorite piece of music? Dancing to rock n' roll in the living room? Allow yourself moments during each day to charge your batteries. This prevents burn-out and brings more joy in your life. Remember that Validation should bring joy to both you and the people you care for.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

When you choose to engage on a deep level with people living with dementia remember:

- Often older adults will travel back in time to events that FEEL the same as what is going on in the present. So, when they hear of a crisis, a pandemic or even just feel the anxiety around them, they may feel like it's war-time. Old traumas may come up.
- These painful feelings need to be released, not bottled up. People need to express these feelings to someone who they trust, who does not judge or correct or try to fix it. They just need someone to be with them in their emotions.
- Engagement does not mean always being happy, sometimes it's sharing unhappiness, pain or fear (basic human emotions).

Those moments of close, human to human contact, create joy and well-being.

Wishing you all moments of joy,

Vicki

