

# How to Communicate with Confused Older Adults



**Identify yourself.** Approach the person from the front and say who you are. Keep good eye contact. If the person is seated or reclined, get down to that level.

**Call the person by name.**

**Use short, simple words and sentences.** Lengthy requests or stories can be overwhelming. Ask one question at a time.

**Speak slowly and distinctively.** Be aware of speed and clarity. Use a gentle and relaxed tone—a lower pitch is more calming.

**Patiently wait for a response.**

**Repeat questions as needed.** If the person doesn't respond, wait a moment and ask again.

**Turn questions into answers.** Provide the solution rather than the question. For example, say, "The bathroom is right here," instead of asking, "Do you need to use the bathroom?"

**Avoid confusing and vague statements.** If you tell the person to "Hop in!" he or she may interpret your instructions literally. Instead, describe the action directly: "Please come here. Your shower is ready." Instead of using "it" or "that," name the object or place. For example, rather than "Here it is," say "Here is your hat."

**Turn negatives into positives.** Instead of saying, "Don't go there," say, "Let's go here."

**Give visual cues.** Point or touch the item you want the individual to use or begin the task for the person.

**Avoid quizzing.** Reminiscing may be healthy, but avoid asking, "Do you remember when ... ?"

**Write things down.**

**Treat the person with dignity and respect.**