STEP SEVEN

Learn the Language of Dementia
Module Seven

Feelings based communication skills, focusing on feelings

Entering the bubble
Module Seven

Feeling based communication skills, focusing on feelings – *Entering the bubble*

*People living with a dementia MATTER*

“Are you frightened? I am going to run away”

“I want to go home because all I am doing here is wasting away.”

*From “Time to Listen” Sheard et al (2001)*
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**Workshop outline**

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1. **Aim and objectives**

Aim

- To provide an overview for participants of and what range of person centred communication skills are needed.

Objectives

- To enable participants to recognise that a person living with a dementia’s verbal communication may alter due to their experience of a dementia.
- To help participants understand that a person living with a dementia’s ability to communicate is affected not only by damage to the brain but also by factors such as the environment and the ability of those around the person to use person centred communication.
- To introduce participants to person centred communication methods and enable them to practice and use this as a way of enabling and empowering people living with a dementia.
- To highlight that the words and actions people living with a dementia use will ALWAYS have meaning.
- To understand the importance of developing and adapting communication towards the individual and their experience of a dementia and working with their unique strengths.
- To emphasise the importance of working with ‘feelings’ and recognising that people living with a dementia will use their language and actions to express these feelings.
2. Workshop theme

Bubbles, living in separate bubbles

Relevance of theme to the workshop:

People living with a dementia are not different to us – they have not become separated from the world in which we all live- they are not in a different bubble. Instead they are trying to make sense of the world and the experience of living with a dementia.

The idea of the workshop is to illustrate that if we are going to communicate in a feelings based way we need to:

- Relearn our communication skills
- Adapt them to each individual’s view, reality, beliefs and experience of the world they are living in.
- Enter the person living with a dementia’s bubble.

We need to go from this:
TO THIS...

Terminology:

Entering the same bubble, not being in separate bubbles, not bursting a person’s bubble.
3. Overall workshop learning

At the end of this workshop participants should have gained some understanding of:

- Some of the communication difficulties that people living with a dementia can experience.
- The feelings this creates for them.
- How a person living with a dementia’s communication difficulties can be a result of damage to the brain.
- How these difficulties can be affected by a number of other factors that can be altered i.e. others communications skills, the environment.
- How to develop a wide range of communication tools and how to use them appropriately to reflect the uniqueness of the person’s experience of living with a dementia.

People living with a dementia are ‘feeling beings’ and this is expressed in their language. It is important that participants understand that people living with a dementia will increasingly communicate their feelings through language that is not always literal.
4. **Summary of key learning messages**

- If we are going to communicate better with people living with a dementia we must first be aware of our own style of communication- i.e. what is our body language, tone of voice etc telling others?

- People living with a dementia will pick up another person’s feelings via a person’s body language, tone of voice.

- We can learn new ways of communicating to make it easier for people living with a dementia to understand us.

- We need to acknowledge the importance of body language, tone of voice, facial expressions and our feelings when communicating with people living with a dementia.

- All of our brains have difficulty in processing language this difficulty can be increased because of a dementia.

- It can be very frustrating when we experience difficulty in communicating with words for example, not being able to find the right words or muddling up our words, and so it is important to empathise with people living with a dementia who may experience this difficulty everyday.

- People living without dementia’s brains process language and information very quickly due to cells in the brain passing information from one to another. However damage to the cells because of a dementia gradually affects the brains ability to process and understand language.

- The speed at which the brain can do this becomes much slower and words often become lost in the process

- People living with a dementia cannot change their communication difficulties it is up to us to change our methods

- People living with a dementia have to face increased difficulty when processing language and so we need to recognise the value of silence, pauses and giving the person time to respond before jumping in with another question

- Also we need to consider the benefit of using shorter sentences and statements rather than continually asking questions which makes people feel ‘put on the spot’ and highlights difficulties in answering.

- There are a number of areas in the brain which are involved in communication.
• These areas all do different things to do with communication, i.e. the ability to understand the spoken word, understanding the meaning of a word, reading words, speaking, singing etc.

• Damage to different parts of the brain involved in communication can cause a person living with a dementia to experience different difficulties.

• There are ways in which we can work with the person’s working communication areas of the brain. For example some people living with a dementia may find it easier to read speech rather than listening to it or they may find it easier to understand a sentence that is sung rather than spoken etc.

• Each person living with a dementia will experience a unique progression of damage to the brain.

• We need to consider how we can adapt communication to suit the needs and strengths of an individual.

• Mirroring, active listening, touch, tone of voice, eye contact, short sentences are all useful methods in showing the person living with a dementia that we are listening and feeling their words and emotions.

• Our communication methods should reflect the needs of the person with a dementia.

• Music is a powerful way of communicating with people living with a dementia.

• If we use a person living with a dementia’s own unique language then we can open up a whole new world of interaction.

• These communication methods are possible and effective.

• For any of us when we have mistakes highlighted, are asked difficult questions we do not know the answer to, or are spoken to in a negative way we will have an emotional reaction, usually a negative one.

• When this happens to people living with a dementia they will experience the same negative feelings however the consequences will be more damaging for people living with a dementia who may already have feelings of low self esteem.

• It is our responsibility to change our verbal communication to prevent such feelings and instead use positive communication which promotes well being.

• The type of language we use with people living with a dementia will have an influence upon the person’s feelings.

• The use of negative words, such as shouldn’t and can’t, when communicating with people living with a dementia can cause them to feel as if they have been accused, foolish and like a child. The person may respond, as any of us would, in a number of ways.
• Instead the use of positive language can make a person feel valued and important.

• It is our responsibility to make sure that we do not highlight mistakes to the person living with a dementia through our language or actions.

• We should stop asking a person living with a dementia questions, which test their memory and makes them feel under pressure. Instead we can use positive statements.

• Through our language and actions we need to enter the person living with a dementia’s bubble.

• People living with a dementia will increasingly communicate their feelings through language that is not always literal.

• People living with a dementia are often prevented from expressing these feelings because we do not really ‘listen’ to what the person living with a dementia is trying to tell us. We take the words for literal and respond accordingly. However by wrongly focusing on agreeing, disagreeing, telling the truth, distracting the person, ignoring the person etc we are not feeling the emotions the person living with a dementia is feeling at that moment in time as they try and make sense of their bubble.

• We need to enter the person living with a dementia’s bubble and recognise the feelings they are using through their words regardless of whether this matches with ‘our view’ of the world.

• If we do not do this with a person living with a dementia they will eventually give up and they will be unnecessarily pushed even further into their bubble.

• It is important that a person living with a dementia is not faced with numerous different responses to their words. This will only illustrate to the person living with a dementia that they are not being listened to.

• When people living with a dementia express feelings they are genuine and real to the person. When these feelings are not acknowledged or ignored by others this causes even more distress for the person.

• The feelings created by not being listened to are the same feelings any of us would experience if our feelings were also ignored and we were given the same responses that we give to people living with a dementia.

• Participants need to reflect on their practice and to see what kind of communicator they are regarding the people living with a dementia they support.

• Participants need to reflect on their current strengths regarding communicating with people living with a dementia and areas that could be improved on.
5. **Action Plan - Module Seven: Learn the Language of Dementia**

- **Using the training exercises on communication - drawing the Boat, The Six Sentences, 'Less Questions, Less Negatives, Less Logic' and Mirroring** - how will these been shared with the staff team?

- **Interpreting the meaning behind the words** - what training will be given to staff on this?

- **Going with people's different reality** - how will this be implemented? Will actual examples of people’s reality be used to describe this?

- **Accepting people's changed lives** - in what ways will staff and families be helped to understand that people living with a dementia may not go with their past reality and life choices and may make new choices inconsistent with their past preferences?

- **Learning about 'searching' words** - how many staff will understand what this means and how to respond to people searching for Mum, Dad, Kids, School, Work and Home?

- **Matching types of communication to the point of dementia someone is experiencing** - what training will staff be receiving on when to use reality orientation and when not - and when to go with people's reality and when and how to reach people further on in their experience of a dementia?

- **Knowing when to use 'Mirroring'** - what training will staff be receiving on when and how to use and what the real meaning of mirroring is?

- **Establishing closeness with people** - how will staff be supported to understand people living with a dementia are more feeling beings than thinking beings and that therefore the need for closeness is greater?

- **Practising intense listening** - how will staff using the course hand-out be helped to practice this skill?
6. Reading and Reference list

Books


Reference list

Video


Alzheimer’s Society. (2002). *Yesterday today and tomorrow –section 3* Alzheimer’s Society, London. (Telephone number to order from Alzheimer’s Society 01904 633704)

Music


Books/ articles


7. Additional handouts are on the following pages
Communicating with people living with a dementia - factors to consider

All of these ‘points’ need to be appropriately matched to an individual person.

The environment

- Reduce noise levels.
- Limit distractions.
- Ensure room well lit.
- Remove mirrors for some people.
- Get rid of shadows.
- Check temperature with person.
- Create a warm and friendly atmosphere.
- Do not use interview rooms.
- Ensure room feels safe and familiar.

Basic communication skills

- Set a good atmosphere first.
- Gain attention.
- Use your/ their name.
- Begin conversation socially.
- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Lower pitch of voice.
- Use short sentences.
- Avoid abstract ideas.
- Pause, allow time.
- Help if the person is struggling with words.
- Repeat their words back to them.
- Avoid too many questions.
- Use statements instead.
- Demonstrate visually.
- Speak to them as an adult.
- Allow time to grasp content.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Avoid jargon.
- Avoid open questions.
- Summarise what has been understood.
- Avoid ‘why’ questions, ask instead who, what, where and when.

The person

- Know something about their life history.
- Establish their reality.
- Work with their beliefs.
- Believe there is sense.
- Focus on the person.
- Record their use of words.
- Check for sensory impairment.
- Watch for stress or pain.

The disease

- Establish which dementia.
- Understand which part of the brain is affected.
- Clarify which stage of dementia.

Common communication symptoms

- Difficulty finding words.
- Difficulty naming objects.
- Difficulty writing.
- Cannot comprehend instructions.
- Cannot sustain conversation.
• Cannot complete sentences.
• Tendency to repeat ideas/words.
• Produces scrambled sentences.
• Tendency to repeat ideas.
• Produce scrambled sentences.
• Failure to recognise humour.

**Focusing your self**

• Reaching out to the other.
• Setting aside our mask.
• Reaching behind other’s mask.
• Removing the protective barrier, which isolates.
• Provide warmth, spontaneity, emotion, and self-disclosure.
• Use genuine very close eye contact.
• Speak in a clear, low and nurturing voice tone.
• Use touch if this seems appropriate.
• Limit use of negative words i.e. don’t, can’t, wouldn’t.
• Use positive statements.
• Do not patronise.
• Indicate a sense of respect.
• Until trust established remain friendly but formal.

**Intense listening**

*To understand people living with a dementia’s, use of language:*

• Focus on the quality of their response, not just the words.
• Avoid over controlling content of their talk.
• Join in their worlds.
• Look for similar themes.
• Look for repetition of words, which may have significant meaning.
• Allow for flexible interpretation.
• Feel comfortable not knowing.
• Act as memory back by repeating to encourage further talk.
• Remember talk may be dislocated from the present.
• Write down what they say and reflect on its meaning.
• Look for use of assonance, alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, cadence and metaphor and search behind these for meaning.
• Consider the use of items to encourage communication i.e. pictures, cuddly toys, dolls etc without being patronising.
Learning the language of dementia – Training exercise

Strategy 1: State ideas in positive rather than negative terms. Each of the ideas below are stated in negative terms. Restate them in positive terms:

“Don’t put the ice cream in the oven”

“You don’t need to wear your cardigan over your jersey”

“Don’t move like that when I’m trying to shave you”

Strategy 2: Avoid questions by stating ideas in positive terms. Turn each of the following questions into positive statements:

“What would you like to wear today?”

“Who is the baby in this photograph?”

“Do you want to wash up?”

Strategy 3: Do not reason and apply logic. The following statement uses logic and reasoning. Offer an alternative response that does not confront the individual:

“You know that toothpaste goes on your teeth and not in your hair”
Making sense

You are working with a woman aged 85 years. The woman has a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease and during your discussions with her, makes the following comments to you. How will you respond?

1) “My mum will be coming soon for me, won’t she”

2) “.. and in a minute I shall have to run and pick up the children from school”

3) “I want to go home, you can’t keep me here”.

4) “I can’t be stopping here I’ll be late for work”.

5) “This is my daddy”- as she points to the arm of the chair.

6) “I’ve known you since you were three years old haven’t I”.

Working on the basis that you know very little about the woman, please focus on your actual responses to these statements.
# Entering the bubble questionnaire

Please complete the following questionnaire by putting a tick in the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe that I concentrate well when a Person living with a dementia is talking to me.</td>
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<td>2. I am not easily distracted when listening to a Person living with a dementia.</td>
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<td>3. I maintain good eye contact.</td>
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<td>4. I encourage the Person living with a dementia to use other forms of communication other than just talking.</td>
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<td>5. I put aside personal distractions when listening to a Person living with a dementia.</td>
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<td>6. I am rarely bored when listening to a Person living with a dementia.</td>
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<td>7. I always assume value and believe there is meaning in what People living with a dementia say and do.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>STRONGLY AGREE</td>
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<td>8. I do not interrupt even when a Person living with a dementia states a view I disagree strongly with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I let the Person living with a dementia know I am listening through my body language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. I let the Person living with a dementia know I am listening by rephrasing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I let the Person living with a dementia finish before I respond.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I try not to let my mind wander when a Person living with a dementia is talking to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. People think of me as a good listener.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Now please write down

- What do you think are your listening strengths.

- And what areas you need to improve on.

Adapted from Management Performance Limited.
What matters most - working with people living with a dementia

Having a HEART, displaying COURAGE and focusing on FEELINGS

Guess where the quotes come from?

1. “You’re not using your head as if you’ve got no brains”
   (reply) “…….. you just won’t listen that’s all”

2. “I want ..........a place were there isn’t any trouble.”

3. “You’re running away because they don’t understand you.”
   “It’s almost as if you can see inside me.”

4. “Close your eyes in order to be better tuned into the infinite”

5. “You don’t suppose she’s sick do you? I have to get home to her right away.”

6. “Which is the way back, I can’t go the way I came?”

7. “My, ........ People come and go so quickly here.”

8. “That’s the trouble, I can’t make up my mind, I haven’t got a brain.”

9. “How can you talk if you haven’t got a brain?”
   “I don’t know, but some people without brains do an awful lot of talking!”
10. “Oh, I’m a failure because I haven’t got a brain.”

11. “I won’t try to manage things because I can’t think.”

12. “How would you like for someone to come along and pick something off you?”

13. “You’re the best friends anybody ever had and its funny I feel as if I’ve known you all the time. Still, I wish I could remember, but it doesn’t matter anyway, we know each other now, don’t we?”

14. “I was so happy I thought I was on my way home.”

15. “’I’m frightened, I’m frightened – I’m trying to get home.”

16. “Why anybody can have a brain, that’s a very mediocre commodity.”

17. “Hearts will never be practical until they can be made unbreakable.”

18. “A heart is not judged by how much you love, but by how much you are loved by others.”

19. “If I ever go looking for my heart’s desire again I won’t look any further than my own back yard, because if it isn’t there I never really lost it to begin with.”

20. “There’s no place like home!”

© Wizard of Oz. MGM
Entering the bubble

When communicating with people living with a dementia we need to look to:

**The person** – their life history, reality, beliefs, use of words.

**The environment** – noise levels, distractions, lighting, remove mirrors.

**The disease** - type of dementia, which part of the brain is affected, the experience of the dementia.

**Communication strengths** – What are the person with dementia’s communication strengths and abilities?

**Communication difficulties** - Words, naming objects, writing, understanding instructions.

**Look at yourself** – Remove the barrier, join in the person living with a dementia’s bubble, interpret, feel comfortable not always knowing.

And **LOOK AT THE FEELINGS BEHIND THE WORDS!**
Making sense of their reality

**Question** - A person who uses our service, regularly asks for her mother during the day, who sadly has passed away. When I told her that her mother was dead, she broke down and called me a liar. The next day she asked me again, and I responded in the same way and the same happened. I feel ever so guilty when I tell her but I do not want to lie to her. What should I do?

**Answer** - Because the person has forgotten that her mother has died (because of the damage to her brain) telling her that her mother is dead, for her, is like finding out for the first time and all the feelings of loss and pain will overwhelm her. This is why she cried and called you a liar. The key thing to take away from this is that the need for a person with dementia to seek someone or something from their past is more likely to be about their present feelings of fear, frustration or unease about where they are than it is about the actual thing referred to.

It might help to….

1. Consider what you know about the person’s past life - was her mother a positive or negative figure in her life?
2. Try and think why would someone want their mother?
3. Think about what does the word ‘mother’ mean to her? Does it mean love, safety, attachment, comfort, someone you turn to when you are feeling down?
4. Try and concentrate on the feelings she is trying to express through her words. For instance by asking for her mother is she telling you that she is feeling frightened or lost. (Everything a person with dementia says or does should be seen as meaningful i.e. there is always a reason behind a person’s words or behaviour).
5. Listen to her and let her express how she is feeling.
6. Try not to confuse her by telling her mother will be coming later (she will probably sense that you are lying and so will not trust you in the future. Also she will wonder where her mother is when she does not turn up and so ask you, or someone else, again for her mother).
7. Instead talk about her mother with her. For example you could say to her “Your mother means a lot to you, doesn’t she”.
8. Work with her to think how you can help her feel the way she did when she was with her mother (by filling the emotional gap that losing her mother has left in her life) i.e. by making her feel valued, secure. Try and reassure her that she is loved and she is special.

A further example of this is when a person says that they have to go to work. What they could be trying to tell you is that they have a need to feel useful, respected and stimulated. So try and find ways of helping a person meet their need. So if they are feeling
bored, give them something meaningful to do. (It could be an activity, which is linked to their old job). Many people with dementia can learn to live with their losses, such as having to give up work, if we provide the right type of support.

As you will be aware there are often SIX key areas that people with dementia talk about:

- MUM
- DAD
- SCHOOL
- HOME
- WORK
- CHILDREN

This Question and Answer tries to demonstrate that it is important not to focus on literal words but the meaning behind the words being used and the feeling the person with dementia is likely to be having which causes them to talk about the above subjects.

For example the need:

- To feel secure and safe.
- For purpose in life.
- For someone who will protect them.
- To feel loved.
- To feel a sense of belonging.

Living in a care setting is often likely to heighten these feelings, which is why people with dementia talk about them so often.

This type of approach might not be suitable with everyone. However what it does do is let us focus on the feelings of the person and try and meet the person’s needs expressed through their words.

Taken from the publication published by the Alzheimer’s Society in association with Dementia Care Matters – “Making Each Day Count” – Providing Quality Dementia Care Services for People with Dementia – To order please telephone Alzheimer’s Society Learning and Education 01904 633704
Intense listening

Group exercise

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to share your thoughts and views in the group as to how people with dementia communicate and what might actually be being said by them.

The task

1. Please consider the pieces of separate speech below made by different people with dementia.

2. Work on the basis that you do not know any of the individuals with dementia who are talking.

3. In your group share all your ideas of what has been said and how you would respond – the more ideas the better, there is no one right answer necessarily.

4. Record all your ideas for each piece on a flipchart and give the reasons why you think it might mean one thing or another.

Speech examples

a) “Well its the same thing all the while. I didn’t think he’d turn out that bad. He’s never been like that with other people. He’s following me about everywhere. Not very good. He’s on his games again. He’ll come and thump me. I know nobody’ll believe it – but its true.”

(Kath, a woman with Alzheimer’s disease, living in a residential home, said in the lounge).

b) “I’d like a bucket of water in my room.”

“When you come to our age you don’t make it a trouble you think that something’s watching you as well as God.”

(Remark made by a woman with dementia sat in her bedroom in a residential home).
c) “Well we come along from the High Street....right when you come there and when you come from there, well like supposing you were coming...em...well (unintelligible)...one thing when I go along there, for instance, if I want to see somebody I’ll come, you know to something I like just to come in see it’s all right and come back and say to within myself to say now that’s done. But, I mean there could be a lot more that would make it better, you know, at that time. But, I certainly I... it’s the thing that I’ve always on my mind and I mean I’m not just trying to say that but I do like to play with children and I do like to be helping anybody that’s not...And I mean if that was the case if anything happened to me and that I would hope I mean, it sounds as if I’m being...you know...being...but...it is a thing that I like to have nice people.”

(This woman is a new member of your Day Care Centre – it is her first day and on her arrival you have asked her how she got there).

d) “Yes that’s right, it really, I mean I’ve really felt that I didn’t want to sit.....but you know there are some things that there are you know you’ve got to throw out and see right I’m sorry to give you this, but, I I really feel that I’ve you know but I mean she’s she’s been very, very good, I mean doesn’t work up her hands terribly and doesn’t get any in any way while and was so good that I really think, you know, I don’t know how can get it through your...You know? I know you could laugh if you like...but really.”

(Remark made by a woman with dementia who is in hospital to a nurse who has asked her about whether she wants tea or coffee).

e) Smiling she says:

“it’s the chap, chap, chap oh the lovely the chap.”

(Phrase repeated many times a day by a woman with dementia).
Dementia care - intense listening

Over the last fifteen years in the area of communicating with people with dementia, various approaches have been adopted:

- Reality Orientation
- Reminiscence
- Validation
- Feeling based skills

More recently a number of people (see references) have been exploring from different angles what Dr Tom Kitwood has coined, “The language of dementia.” This paper drawing on this work seems to summarise these ideas and to promote further exploration of these concepts when communicating with people with dementia.


*John Killick has frequently observed that the language used by people with dementia often has unusually imaginative qualities. It uses some of the devices out of which poems are made. Some of these are explained below:*

Assonance: The use of the same vowel sound with different consonants e.g. Mystery and mastery

Alliteration: The use of the same consonant e.g. “around the rock the ragged rascal ran”

Rhyme: A word that is identical to another in its sound e.g. “while” is a rhyme for “mile”

Rhythm: The arrangement of words into a sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables or long and short syllables.

Cadence: A fall in the pitch of the voice as at the end of a sentence or intonation.

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance. ‘He is a lion in battle’


2. Rik Cheston: School of Sciences, University of Bath

This work emphasises the importance of analysing talk in terms of its social function. The approach focuses on communicating with people with dementia and that:

- *there is a need for listening rather than hearing*
- *the meaning of their words is within a social context*
- *the words often require/are seeking an acknowledgment of loss, fear, isolation*
- *intense listening is therefore an act of sense making.*
Rik Cheston also drawing on the work of Laura Sutton acknowledges the same ideas as John Killick on the importance of understanding the use of METAPHOR in talking with people with dementia and suggests this use by people with dementia is:

- an exploration of their own experience
- expressed feelings with regard to the dementia
- creating social identity through talk
- relieves the emotional trauma

and that people with dementia are, “**Telling it like this.**”

3. **Caroline Keegan – “Talking with Jean”** – Dementia Services Development Centre, University of Stirling.

In a recently published paper Caroline Keegan explores the ideas of:

- experiencing a strong sense of what is being meant by people with dementia
- being able to interpret what is being said.

This paper raises a number of significant issues and questions some of which can be summarised below:

- the need to consider are we ‘inflicting’ discussion on people with dementia?
- do people with expressive dysphasia lose the meaning of words or not?
- the need to examine more closely confabulation i.e. ‘a falsification of memory’ to seek out the level of insight within this
- the need to recognise how our discussion may trigger complex feelings and emotions in people with dementia
- it is possible people with unmeasured memory placed in ‘reminiscence sessions’ may at times trigger individual distress

**Summary**

This short paper’s purpose is only to highlight a few key issues in this new area of **Intense Listening** and to encourage others to explore this work further. From my own work and those of the authors quoted, points for further work in communicating with people with dementia seem to be:

1. Focus on the quality of the response of someone with dementia and not just on the actual words.

2. Avoid over controlling the content of talk with people with dementia.
3. Scrutinise your own speech and gestures.

4. Consider that reminiscing at times may be triggering unspoken painful feelings.

5. Attempt to join in the world of the person with dementia.

6. Look out for similar “stories” which may be an indicator by the person with dementia of them saying, ‘I understand something’.


8. Allow for flexible interpretation.

9. Feel comfortable ‘not knowing’ what has been said.

10. Act as ‘memory’ back to person with dementia of what said by repeating their words to encourage further talk.

11. Remember talk may be dislocated from their present environment.

12. Offer past sense of triumph over despair.

13. Later try writing down what was said and reflect on it.
Communicating with People living with a Dementia

10 Do’s and 10 Don’ts

There is no one right or wrong way of communicating with people living with a dementia. Communication is an individual process, and what works with one person may not work with another. However, generally, it is useful to practise communicating by following these do’s and don’ts:

1. Do avoid confrontation, and don't confront the person with their mistakes
2. Do respond to feelings, and don't always take words and facts literally
3. Do focus on positives, and don't use controlling words
4. Do make clear and simple statements, and don't use questions beginning with why
5. Do use the word let's and don't use reason and logic
6. Do give directions, one step at a time and don't talk in final outcomes
7. Do act as a person's memory, but don't ask them do you remember
8. Do interpret words and feelings, and don't argue back
9. Do talk with, and don't talk about people in the room
10. Do go along with people, and don't stop them from feeling in control
Banned Sentences!

- You've just asked me that
- You don't go to work any more
- Can't you think of something to do
- You have forgotten again
- You said that before to me
- You can remember if you think harder
- Don't you remember .............
- Mrs X is difficult today ..................
- She's been really ...................... today
- I've already told you .................
- Wait a minute
- You've just had your breakfast/lunch
- Stop doing that ..........................
- Don't we all look nice today

Helpful Sentences

- You seem anxious, worried etc
- I can never remember either
- you seem to miss your ..................
- it can be hard to think of things
- let's do this together
- I really need your help
- I'm feeling all lonely and lost too
- I could do with a friend too
- you must have really enjoyed your job
- you loved living in .............
- you were telling me about
- it's annoying when you forget things, isn't it
- I'm sorry you're so angry
- isn't it frustrating when you can't think of a word
- is it something to do with ..................
- you seem worried about .....................

Adapted from: Care to Communicate. Powell, J Hawker Publications 2000
How to connect with people with dementia

Learning messages

- Make connections to your own feelings
- Recognise that people with dementia are feeling not thinking beings
- Interpret feelings in words and actions that are not literal
- Shift towards the person with dementia’s reality
- Practise intense listening
- Communicate from the heart