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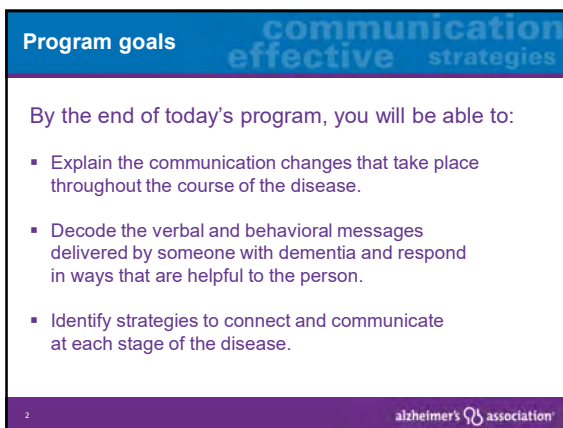
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**Communication changes throughout the disease**

**Early stage (Mild)**


- Convey thoughts and feelings through language.
- Able to make decisions about future care.
- May misinterpret what others say.

**Middle stage (Moderate)**

- Use basic words and sentences.
- Rely more on tone of voice, facial expression and body language.
- Continue to need emotional connection and meaningful activity

**Late stage (Severe)**

- May still respond to familiar words, phrases or songs.
- Use body language and the five senses to connect.

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**Communication in the early stage**

**Changes you may notice include:**

- Difficulty finding the right words.
- Taking longer to speak or respond.
- Withdrawing from conversations.
- Struggling with decision-making or problem-solving.

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 Martha Tierney, LCSW, is Associate Director of Research Volunteer Programs for the National Office of the Alzheimer's Association.

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**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.



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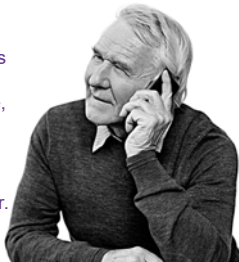
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**Communication in the early stage**

**Keep in mind:**

- Avoid making assumptions.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Communicate in the way that is most comfortable for the person. Options include phone, email, and in person.
- Laugh together.
- Be honest, laugh together, and stay connected with each other.



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**Communication in the middle stage**

**Changes you may notice include:**

- Increased difficulty finding the right words.
- Using familiar words repeatedly.
- Inventing new words to describe familiar things.
- Easily losing train of thought.
- Speaking less frequently.
- Communicating through behavior rather than words more often.

Consult a doctor when you notice major or sudden changes.

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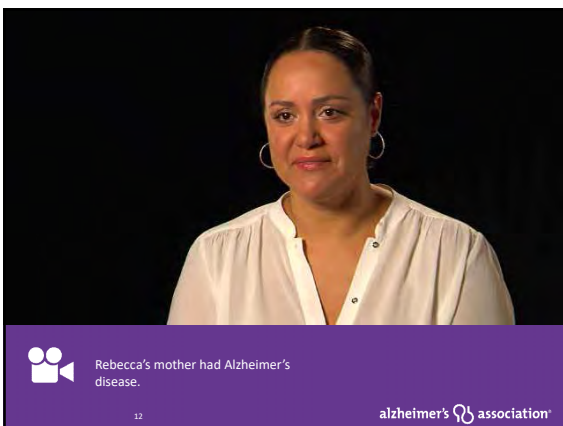
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**Communication in the middle stage**

**To connect, join the person's reality**

Keep respect and empathy in your mind, then:

- 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.

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**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.
- Offer a guess or fill in words if acceptable.

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**Communication in the middle stage**

**To connect, give multiple cues**

- Provide visual cues and gestures.
- Avoid sudden movement.
- Write things down for the person.
- Put answers into your questions.
- Repeat as needed.
- Turn negatives into positives.
- Avoid quizzing.



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**Communication in the middle stage**

**To connect, respond empathically and reassure**

- Join the person's reality.
- Provide reassurance that you hear and understand.
- Focus on the feelings, not the facts.
- Validate and redirect the person if necessary.

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**Communication in the late stage**

**Changes you may notice include:**

- Communication is reduced to a few words or sounds.
- Possible responses to familiar words or phrases.

**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.

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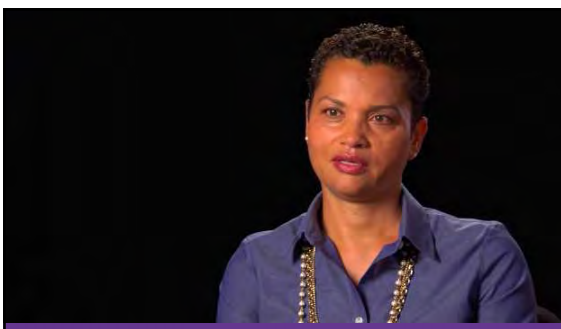
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Sandra's mother is in the late stage of Alzheimer's disease.

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**Communication in the late stage**

**Connect through touch**

- Feel different fabrics.
- Identify shapes by touch.
- Give lotion hand massages.
- Identify everyday items in a bag by touch.
- Visit with animals.
- Sculpt using non-toxic materials.
- Hold the person's hand or stroke his or her arm or back.



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**Communication in the late stage**

**Connect through sight**

- Laminate brightly colored pictures to look at together.
- Watch videos of animals, nature or travel.
- Look at photo albums together.
- View photos of famous paintings, favorite settings or prominent people from the past.
- Go bird-watching or visit an aquarium.
- Paint with watercolors.
- Go outdoors or sit by an open window together.

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**Communication in the late stage**

**Connect through sound**

- Listen to familiar music.
- Listen to recordings of the sounds of nature, farms, cities or animals.
- Identify musical instruments by sound.
- Listen to songs or speech in the person's native language.
- Read books, poetry, scripture, or newspaper articles to the person.
- Let the person hear the gentle tone of your voice.

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**Communication in the late stage**

**Connect through smell**

- Make small plastic bags containing items for the person to smell, such as:
  - Herbs or spices.
  - Cotton balls dipped in essential oils.
  - Grass clippings or fragrant flowers.
  - Teas or coffee beans.
- Use fragrant lotions for hand massages
- Cook or feed the person foods that smell good, such as apple pie or chicken soup.

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**Communication in the late stage**

**Connect through taste**

- Favorite foods.
- Home-baked goodies.
- Popsicles.
- Flavored drinks.
- Ice creams and puddings.



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**Communication in all stages of the disease**

- Join the person's reality to connect.
- Understand and accept what you can and cannot change.
- Remember that the person retains a sense of self despite the losses of the disease.
- Demonstrate respect and connect through feelings.
- Always treat the person as the adult he or she is.
- Try to decode the person's communications.
- Recognize the effects of your mood and actions.
- Try to understand the source of reactions.
- Help meet the needs while soothing and calming the person.

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Effective Communication Strategies - March 3, 2020



Sam Fazio, Ph.D., is the Director of Special Projects for the National Office of the Alzheimer's Association.

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### Contact us – we can help

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**alz.org**

- Alzheimer's Navigator
- Community Resource Finder
- ALZConnected
- Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregiver Center
- Safety Center

**800.272.3900**

- 24/7 Helpline – Available all day every day

**alz.org/findus**

- Support groups, education programs and more available in communities nationwide

**training.alz.org**

- Free online education programs available at training.alz.org

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### Get involved

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**WALK TO END ALZHEIMER'S**

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**volunteer**

**THE LONGEST DAY**

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**advocate**

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trialmatch

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Questions?

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**Alzheimer's Association**  
We're here. All day, every day.  
**24/7 Helpline: 800.272.3900**  
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