

Alzheimer's: Use improv strategies to communicate

Tips for communicating with someone who is confused about time, place, or situation.

Trying to orient a confused person to reality

- Alzheimer's affects knowledge of time, place, and situation.
- The brain may also create brand new memories that are false, but are detailed and feel completely real. (Guzmán-Vélez et al., 2014)
- Informing a confused person that they are out of touch with reality can be very disturbing, resulting in confusion, anger, anxiety, or other negative emotions.
- The negative emotions can linger after the incident is forgotten. (Guzmán-Vélez et al., 2014)

Why improv?

- Improv actors follow guidelines that can be very helpful in communicating with a person who is confused.
- Karen Stobbe, founder of Being In The Moment, is an improv actor who cared for her parents who both had dementia—with the help of her husband and improv actor, Mondy Carter.
- Karen and Mondy saw firsthand how improv guidelines improved communication.

Improv guidelines for communication (Stobbe & Carter, 2014)

1. Say: "Yes, and--."
2. Agree, don't deny.
3. Accept offers and gifts.
4. Be specific.
5. Listen fully.
6. Accept the reality given to you.
7. Go with the flow.
8. Share focus. Give and take.
9. Silence can be powerful.
10. Commit 100%.
11. Be in the moment.

Tips for how to use the guidelines for specific situations

- Karen & Mondy's TEDMED talk on YouTube. "Using Improv to Improve Life with Alzheimer's"
- Being in the Moment's Know-How videos.

beinginthemoment.org/know-how-category/whys-what-to-dos/

- Sundowning.
- Asking for people who have passed away.
- Repetitive singing.
- Being embarrassed by their behavior.
- How to respond to false statements.
- Urinating in odd places.
- Wanting to go home.
- Many more!

References

- Guzmán-Vélez, E., Feinstein, J. S., & Tranel, D. (2014). Feelings without memory in Alzheimer disease. *Cognitive and behavioral neurology : official journal of the Society for Behavioral and Cognitive Neurology*, 27(3), 117–129.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4175156/>
- Stobbe, K., & Carter, M. (2014). *Using improv to improve life with Alzheimer's* [Video]. TEDMED. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GciWltvLo_s