

# Dealing with Dementia

By  
Judith S. Parnes,  
L.C.S.W., C.M.C.  
Executive  
Director



What could be more agonizing than the personality and memory loss of Alzheimer's disease? Even professionals often do not know how to handle the situation. In an effort to draw on Alzheimer victim's remaining capacities, Ripiche and Wykle (1990) have designed a program for enhancing communication between caregivers and affected people.

The seven-step program uses the acronym –

**FOCUSED** - to identify the major elements for the maintenance of communication:  
Face to face, Orientation, Continuity, Unsticking, Structure, Exchanges, and Direct.

## *F = FACE TO FACE.*

1. Face the person directly
2. Attract the person's attention
3. Maintain eye contact

## *O = ORIENTATION*

1. Orient the person by repeating key words several times
2. Repeat sentences exactly
3. Give the person time to comprehend what you are saying

## *C = CONTINUITY*

1. Continue the same topic of conversation as long as possible
2. Prepare the person if a new topic must be introduced

## *U = UNSTICKING*

- Help the person become "unstuck" when he or she uses a word incorrectly by suggesting the correct or missing word
1. Repeat the person's sentence using the correct or missing word
  2. Ask, "Do you mean...?"

## *S = STRUCTURE*

1. Structure your questions to give the person a choice of response
2. Provide only 2 or 3 options at a time
3. Provide options that the person would like

## *E = EXCHANGES*

1. Keep up the normal exchange of ideas we find in conversation
2. Begin conversation with pleasant topics
3. Ask any easy questions that the person can answer
4. Give the person clues as to how to answer

## *D = DIRECT*

1. Keep sentences short, simple and direct (subject-verb-object)
  2. Use and repeat nouns rather than pronouns
  3. Use hand signals, pictures and facial expressions
- We should always keep in mind that beneath the disorientation of the person with dementia there remains a basic humanity that we all share.

*Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C., Gerontologist and Elder Care Consultant is Executive Director of Elder Life Management, Inc., Ocean, NJ. ELM provides quality elder care planning and management services to older adults and their families. Please visit [www.elderlifemanagement.org](http://www.elderlifemanagement.org) or call (732) 493-8080 for more information.*