

## Practical Tips for Accompanying People with Dementia

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The following are some specific suggestions to guide you in accompanying people living with dementia:

### General Approaches

1. Try to remain conscious of the other as a being in the divine image – and know that you can be an important model for others around the person.
2. Work on being with silence, with “nothing happening.”
3. Slow down to keep up. Adjust your pace to the person whose life moves slowly, if at all.
4. Be prepared for “magic moments,” when a person who seems generally quite confused may suddenly speak or connect with great clarity and profundity.

### Reaching a Person with Dementia

1. Use position and touch to establish connection. Put yourself at eye level, and address the person when you are close to him or her.
2. Always identify yourself, even if you expect the other to recognize you (it can be very embarrassing to a memory-impaired person not to remember who you are).
3. Acknowledge how difficult it is not to be able to communicate better, to understand one another.
4. Use “parallel talking”—express what you observe the person is experiencing or expressing non-verbally; your interpretive comments can “give voice” to the person who cannot express himself or herself.
5. Use statements, not questions. If you do ask questions, make them concrete and closed-ended, and try not to make them into tests (“do you remember me?”).

6. When confronting “unreal” content from the person, attend to the reality beneath that content: what is the person feeling? What does this content mean to him or her? Validate the feelings and meanings without validating the content.
7. Use diversion (take a walk, change the subject, sing a song) to help refocus a person who is anxious about something unreal.
8. Be sensitive to concrete requests and their meanings (don’t discount them).

### Caring for Yourself while Caring for People with Dementia

1. Acknowledge that this is a demanding task!
2. Maintain or begin spiritual and physical practices that can anchor you (meditation, prayer, breathing).
3. Get support from others. Don’t be afraid to talk about your struggles.
4. Keep a sense of humor, and don’t be afraid to show it!
5. Modify your expectations.
6. Know that what “works” to connect will vary from moment to moment and day to day—sometimes presence alone soothes, sometimes ritual brings joy, and sometimes, you need to trust that connection is real on a soul-plane, even if it is not apparent in the here-and-now.

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