

Overcoming Frustration Through Prompting

Caring at home for a person with dementia evokes many emotions, and there's no question that frustration is one of them. Sometimes it may seem as if your loved one is refusing to perform simple actions in order to deliberately provoke you. Ironically, expressing irritation with them, even if only through body language, can make the situation worse, and carrying out tasks for them instead of with them can hasten the dwindling of their abilities.

A technique known as prompting can go a long way toward fostering a more successful care partnership. It can help you and your loved one communicate better and work together more smoothly. It also encourages the person in your care to be involved in everything to their highest level of ability.

Prompting refers to giving a verbal, physical, or gesture cue to indicate what the person with dementia is expected to do next. This process taps into familiar movements that are stored in long-term memory, which often remains well into the disease's progression.

There are six types of prompting:

- **Transition:** Transition prompts should be used during every interaction with your loved one to alert him or her that something is happening. Make eye contact and use cheerful body language while making a simple statement that indicates what is coming next. An example would be saying "Good morning, dear; you must be hungry" before accompanying your loved one to the kitchen table for breakfast.
- **Verbal:** Verbal prompts consist of giving step-by-step directions. Again, use a cheerful manner and a helpful, respectful tone to say something such as "Use the spoon to stir your coffee." Verbal prompts should be short and simple.
- **Gestures:** Gesture prompting is pointing to an object or touching your loved one to indicate where you want them to take action. Perhaps both of you have gone outside to check the mailbox. You can point to it or touch his or her hand to suggest opening it.
- **Demonstration:** Demonstration prompts involve showing or mimicking for your loved one the action you'd like accomplished. If you serve a glass of iced tea and wish to encourage them to drink it, bring an imaginary glass to your own lips as a signal.
- **Hand-over-hand:** Here, you place your hand over that of your loved one to guide the desired action from beginning to end. After repeating it several times, let go to see if they can continue on their own.
- **Hand-under-hand:** Providing more assistance than hand-over-hand, this technique consists of hooking your thumb under your loved one's to take them through the physical action of the task, while you are the one actually doing it. It helps them maintain awareness and involvement in the action. It helps to start this prompt with a simple handshake and then swivel your hand around until you have accomplished the

thumb grasp. This is the ideal physical prompt as it allows for your loved one to have more control and you can affect both gross and fine motor movements.

People living with dementia can experience fluctuations in ability on a daily basis, and even from one time of day to the next. This is especially true for those living with Lewy Body dementia. If your loved one couldn't do something this morning, it doesn't mean they can't this afternoon or ever again. Be careful to just use the amount of prompts and cues needed, rather than over-assisting, which can take away your loved one's sense of control and even their abilities eventually. The phrase "use it or lose it" is on target here - if we don't encourage people with dementia to do things at their highest capacity, they may soon be unable to do it at all.

Prompting also helps your loved one maintain self-esteem by preserving a sense of accomplishment and independence. It promotes more teamwork in the care process and thus can greatly reduce frustration, which is a tremendous benefit to everyone involved.