

Simple Scripts for Family Caregivers

Talking to Someone with Dementia

Gentle words for hard moments

This handout gives you simple ways to respond when a loved one is confused, upset, repetitive, or resistant. The goal is not to say the perfect thing. The goal is to help the person feel safe, respected, and less overwhelmed.

A few things to remember:

- Keep your voice calm and your words short.
- Try not to argue, correct, or force reality.
- Offer one step at a time.
- Validation usually works better than explanation.
- If one approach is not working, pause and try again differently.

When they ask the same question over and over

Instead of: “I already told you that.”

Try: “You’re wondering about that again. It’s okay. We’re all set, and I’m here with you.”

Also try: “I know this feels important. Let me help you with it.”

When they say they want to go home

Try: “You miss home. Tell me what you miss most about it.”

Or: “You want to be somewhere that feels familiar and safe. I’m right here with you.”

Then redirect: “Let’s sit together for a minute, and then we can have some tea.”

When they are confused about the time or place

Try: “It can feel confusing sometimes. You’re safe right now.”

Or: “I know this feels mixed up. I’m here, and I’ll help you through it.”

Avoid long explanations. Short reassurance usually helps more.

When they refuse a bath, clothes change, or help

Try: “Okay, we don’t have to do it right this second.”

Then later: “Let’s just do one small step. How about we wash your hands first?”

Or: “Would you rather do this now or after we sit down for a minute?”

When they become angry or agitated

Try: “I can see that you’re upset.”

Then: “You’re safe. I’m not here to argue with you. I’m here to help.”

If needed: “Let’s take a little break from this.”

When they accuse you of something that is not true

Instead of proving them wrong, focus on the feeling underneath.

Try: “That sounds upsetting.”

Or: “I can see why that would bother you. Let’s figure this out together.”

When they are suspicious or fearful

Try: “That sounds scary.”

Then: “You’re safe with me.”

Or: “Let me stay with you for a minute.”

When they are grieving someone who already died

Usually it is kinder not to make them relive the loss repeatedly.

Try: “You’re missing them today.”

Or: “Tell me about them.”

Then gently redirect: “They meant a lot to you. Let’s look at this picture together.”

When they are embarrassed after a mistake or accident

Try: “It’s okay. We’ll take care of it together.”

Or: “No big deal. Let’s just get you comfortable.”

Keep dignity front and center.

When they are overwhelmed and overstimulated

Try: “There’s a lot going on right now. Let’s make things quieter.”

Or: “Come with me. Let’s sit somewhere calm for a minute.”

When they do not want you to leave

Try: “I’ll be back soon.”

Or: “You’re okay. Someone is here with you.”

If leaving is hard, avoid long goodbyes when possible.

When you need to redirect

Try: “Can you help me with something?”

Or: “Let’s go look at this for a minute.”

Or: “Come sit with me while I do this.”

A gentle reminder for family caregivers

- You are not expected to have the perfect words every time.
- What matters most is the tone: calm, reassuring, and respectful.
- If a script does not work in the moment, that does not mean you failed. It usually means the person needs something different - less talking, more reassurance, a break, food, rest, or a quieter space.

For education and caregiver support only.