

# How to Communicate with a Loved One with Dementia

with

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LLC

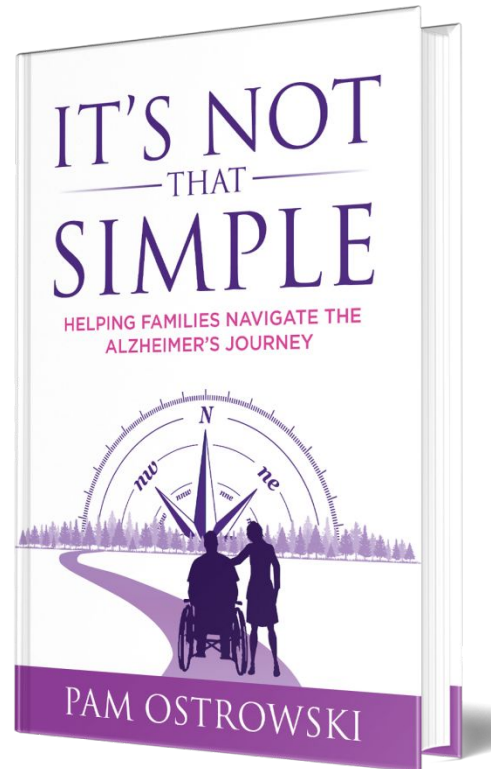
Author of

“It’s Not That Simple: Helping Families  
Navigate the Alzheimer’s Journey”



## 36th Annual Caregiver's Conference: Caregiving with Hope and Inspiration

# Who is Pam Ostrowski



I've been there and walked in your shoes for 14 years.



# Are we ready for Alzheimer's?

- \* 6.5 million Americans diagnosed with Alzheimer's, most occurring above the age of 75
- \* The first Baby Boomers turned 75 in 2021
- \* By 2029, ALL Baby Boomers will be 65+
- \* 1 in 9 people (11.3%) over the age of 65 have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's
- \* 70 million Baby Boomers = ~7.9 million
- \* 1 out of 6 Americans are providing care to an aging loved one. Some studies state as high as 73%.

***Communicating is a CRITICAL factor***

# How do we communicate?

There are four ways:

- \* Visual - “I SEE what you mean”
- \* Auditory/Aural – “I HEAR what you’re saying” or “Are you listening?”
- \* Read/Write – A bit of visual and aural combined (subvocalization)
- \* Kinesthetic – “Let me write that down.” or “Let me show you.”

**Tip #1: The MORE the MERRIER! Think back to how your loved one communicated best. Replicate that now.**

# How do you want your loved one to FEEL about your interactions?

## Tip #2:

The ONE thing those with dementia feel and remember are EMOTIONS

- \* Is it a “struggle” or just a change in how you communicate? What’s your MINDSET?
- \* Those with memory loss remember EMOTIONS more than anything else.
- \* Manage your expectations of your interactions.
- \* You want to create moments of joy and better experiences for you both.

# Which is why I say...

**BIG Tip 3: NEVER argue with someone with dementia**



# How to Speak Differently

Tip #4: You have to speak so **THEY** understand. It may make sense to you, but it may not to them.

- ✓ Use short phrases, not long complex sentences
- ✓ Don't ramble on
- ✓ Avoid giving them more than two choices at a time. Keep it simple.
- ✓ Give them **TIME** to respond – 20-30 seconds, not 5 seconds
- ✓ Don't argue with them or try to correct them



# How to Speak Differently

- \* Avoid getting frustrated if they ask the same question many times. They literally have no short term memory.
- \* No, they're not lying so please don't assume they are.
- \* Don't ignore them or not include them when talking with others.

For mid to late stage dementia, especially Alzheimer's

- \* Position yourself at their level so you're looking into their eyes.
- \* Introduce yourself (It's Pam, Mom)



# Avoid Getting Frustrated

- \* Show, don't instruct. *When in doubt, act it out.*
- \* Help them if it's a complicated task such as putting on a sweater or unfolding a napkin.
- \* Know that they have good days and bad days. Accept that these will vary on every visit.
- \* Tone – Keep the tone of your voice loving, calm, and respectful. Do not make them feel ashamed of themselves just because they can't function as they once used to. NEVER laugh at them and make sure every visitor understands this.
- \* If your frustration starts building, it's time to walk away (after saying I love you).

# How to Greet and Leave

- \* **Greeting** – Give them a hug and greet them at their eye level. Then introduce yourself in relation to how they would have known you. “Hi Mom. It’s Pam.”
- \* **Visitors** - Bring each person forward individually and ask them to introduce themselves “Hi Grandpa. It’s your grandson, Bob.” Include your loved one. Hold their hand. Rub their shoulders or back. Have ice cream. Let them know they’re loved.
- \* **How to leave** – Avoid using days of the week for the next visit. Just say “I’ll be back” or “I’ll see you later.”
  - \* I love you. I’ll be back in a bit.
  - \* I love you. I have to go take the dogs out/pick up the kids/go make dinner, etc. I’ll see you in a bit (or I’ll see you later).

# BONUS: Preparing for an Outing

- \* Check with the care community about *what your loved one likes to eat*. Tastes change.
- \* Assign someone to be the *full-time companion of your loved one* since they'll most likely need help to use the restroom or cut their food (not feed them).
- \* Find a *quiet place for your loved one* to observe from
- \* *Prepare the family* – your loved one may be blunt or share opinions that are not polite. They frequently have no filter.
- \* Give them a *place to escape to for some quiet time*. In small spaces, they may become overwhelmed by all of the stimulation.
- \* Evaluate the *environment for safety and access issues*. Mobility can be an issue. Can your loved one reach the spot you want them to go easily?

# MOST of ALL

## Tip #5:

### **Create Moments of Joy**

They'll remember joy and happiness when they see you.

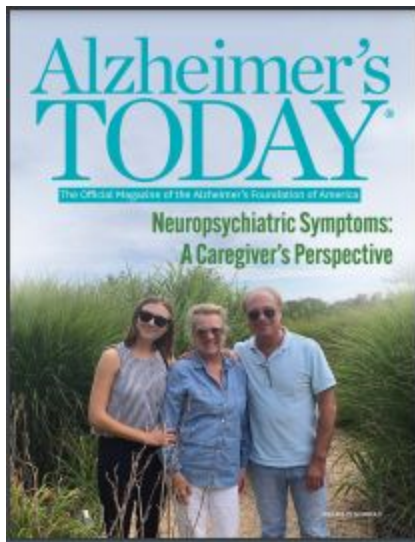
They are **STILL IN THERE!**



# Resources

**Activities** –Alzheimer’s Foundation of America

<https://alzfdn.org/media-center/alztoday/>



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**Research**

Alzheimer’s Association – <https://alz.org>

**Caregiver Group Support**

Memory Café

Local Memory Care Communities

National Family Caregiver Support Program -

<https://acl.gov/programs/support-caregivers/national-family-caregiver-support-program>

# Communicating can be Exhausting

- \* Get respite
- \* Get help
- \* You cannot do it all (avoid “I’ve got this” behaviors)

# Work with Pam

*Schedule time to talk with Pam Ostrowski*

- \* Email your request to  
[Pam@ItsNotThatSimple.com](mailto:Pam@ItsNotThatSimple.com)

***SPECIAL OFFER:***

***The first 30-minutes of your first call is free.***

- \* On the website:  
**AlzheimersFamilyConsulting.com**

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