

Basic Concepts of Person-centered Care
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1. Keep in mind you are relating to a PERSON, not a diagnosis or set of symptoms or limitations. All persons have value, no matter their status or condition.
2. These are persons “living with” dementia, who still have the needs, feelings, thoughts, issues, etc. as other persons, including the need to be known, loved, loving, productive, competent, giving and spiritually involved.
3. The core, personhood, essence, soul of the person is still there and can be accessed, supported, and connected with if we learn how and are reasonable in our expectations. It may be helpful to hold in mind an idea of who that person has always been and why you have loved them, especially during difficult times.
4. Relate through empathy: the ability to identify and understand another person’s feelings, thoughts, actions, etc. from their perspective, whether you feel the same or agree with them or not.
5. Empathy opens up a range of possible responses, based on what you know about what they seem to be experiencing, through your own similar experiences with frustration, anxiety, anger, grief, joy, sadness, etc. How would you want to be treated if you were experiencing the same thing?
6. Meet this person in the moment, in their reality. Don’t try to re-orient, argue, test their memory, etc. This is about their needs, not yours, and not your ego. Being kind is usually more important than being right.
7. You know your loved one and their needs better than anyone, but you have to be open to others’ help and feedback for your blind spots or when your own personal reactions get involved. Forgive yourself when you fail or flounder.
8. Empathy may help you see their “resistance” or “oppositional” behavior or seemingly delusional views differently, perhaps as anxiety or fear or mis-perception or confusion. Try to see the situation through their eyes. Keep in mind the phrase: “The person with dementia isn’t giving you a hard time; they’re having a hard time.”
9. Despite limitations in cognition or communication abilities, there may be a kind of emotional memory such that the person knows you are someone they can trust, who loves them and they love you. The heart remembers what the mind forgets.
10. Change or constantly review your expectations. Look for new ways to communicate and connect, like through music or art, through touch and smiles, through actions, etc. if words aren’t working well. Don’t expect it to be as it’s always been or to remain as it is now.
11. Support lives of dignity, meaning and purpose and as much self-determination as possible, including life and treatment choices and shared decision-making with care “partners” for as long as possible.