

## Communicating when dementia disrupts

Body language, facial expressions, tone, eye contact.

They – along with words – make up communication. They can help us communicate with people with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementia, even when words fail.

“What is communication? Often, we think of it as what I’m saying,” said Tasha Beestman, communication outreach specialist for the Alzheimer’s Association Greater Wisconsin Chapter. “But communication is so much more.” Beestman was the guest speaker at the March meeting of the Alzheimer’s caregiver support group and shared strategies to effective communication with participants.

Often, as people progress through the stages of Alzheimer’s, they lose language skills. In the early or mild stages, they might lose one out of four words. So, in the course of a conversation, for every four words, they might only understand three. In middle or moderate stages, it might be two out of four words. In late or severe stages, it increases to three out of four words. Your loved one won’t understand much of what you say.

But you still can communicate.

It’s important to use short, concise sentences. Use the same words. Don’t say you’re going to the grocery store, then say you’re going to Copps, then say you’re going to shop. That can be confusing to someone with Alzheimer’s. Instead, use the same words each time to ease confusion.

If your loved one is in early stages, ask him or her how you can help. If your loved one is struggling to find a word, does he or she want you to help fill it in? What about if they get lost telling a story? Do they want you to pick up and finish it? This might be comforting or it might seem that you’ve taken over when they wanted to work it out.

Someone with dementia has lost the ability to problem solve. They can’t understand your side of an argument or



*Touch can be an important way to communicate when words fail.*

put themselves in your shoes. “They can’t see it from any other viewpoint than their own,” she said.

Beestman reminded caregivers to take time before answering. If you’re frustrated, walk away, count to 10, go outside. Often that little break will cause the person with dementia to even forget an argument was starting. Spouses, especially, should be aware of the tone of their voice.

As language skills diminish, it’s important to look for other clues. You still can address those other ways of communicating. If someone opens the kitchen cabinets, he or she might be hungry. Who hasn’t stood in front of the open refrigerator looking for something to eat, Beestman asked. If you can’t say you’re hungry, maybe you find a way to express it by looking for something to eat.

She encourages caregivers to respond to emotion. If someone seems sad, ask about it. If someone is sad and you’re not sure why, try to redirect the person to an activity he or she might enjoy. “You seem sad. Let’s maybe go for a walk outside.”

How you use language can make a difference, too. Beestman said bathing is often a trouble spot for caregivers. Rather than saying, “It’s time for your shower,” you can try, “Let’s get cleaned up so you’re ready for lunch,” and tie the unwanted activity – bathing -- to something desired – lunch.

Mostly, it’s important to keep talking, even when language fails the person with Alzheimer’s. They can’t answer, but they are comforted by your voice and touch.

## Employee spotlight

Jamie Weeks isn't sure how she started working for Hilltop, but she remembers when. It was 20 years ago this year. She started babysitting for owner Anita Whetstone's son. Then she began providing care for Whetstone's mother and later her father. Somewhere along the line, that grew into a job.



During the years, Weeks has worked at all of the Hilltop facilities and met a lot of people in the process. She remembers one woman at Hilltop of Pepper a number of years ago who had a whole group gathered, trying to put in the code to get out the door. They didn't know the code, but they were pushing buttons.

Weeks is inspired by her mom. "She's raised three children, works, supported us through the years," she said, referring to herself, her brother and sister.

In her free time, Weeks likes to read. And she discovered she has "a creative streak" when it comes to cake decorating. She wanted to bake something special at Christmas, and got a piping bag. "It was kind of fun," she said.

Weeks has travel on her bucket list. "I'd like to go to Ireland," she said. "It's in my heritage. It's a very pretty place."

## New employees

We welcome these new employees and a returning employee: Jenny Rusch, Hilltop of Pepper; Jessica Konitski, Hilltop of Pepper; Katie Haasl, Alpine Terrace; Alyssa Stockheimer, Hilltop of Pepper; Jayme Hibbard (returning), Alpine Terrace.

## Job fairs

Hilltop attended a job fair aimed at high school and college students in March at the Boys & Girls Club of Wisconsin Rapids.

We also plan to attend a job fair for the general population from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 6 at Mid-State Technical College. Veterans get a special time from 9:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. Come visit us!

## Alzheimer's caregiver support group

Mike Sullivan of Thrivent Financial will discuss long-term care insurance at the Alzheimer's Caregiver Support Group on April 14. On May 2, Karen Bradbury of Park Place will discuss respite care and adult day care options.

We meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Aging & Disability Resource Center in Centralia Center. Join us for a time of sharing. Call 715-423-7400 for information or to arrange free respite care for your loved one so you can attend the meeting.

## Register for Alzheimer's event

There still is time to sign up to attend 30<sup>th</sup> annual Wisconsin Network Conference on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias, May 1 to 3 at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells.

You can learn about the disease, caregiving, research and more. Register online at [www.alzwi.org](http://www.alzwi.org). You can choose from several days' worth of events.





Easter came early this year, which meant we didn't have a lot of time between St. Patrick's Day and the Easter bunny's visit. But we had parties and decorations for each holiday. Mary, left, helped her mom and aunt, two of our employees, make these cute bunny treats for Easter for residents at Hilltop of Pepper. Below, we made a spring-time craft.



## Hilltop Grand Village has its own website

Hilltop Grand Village, Hilltop's resort-style living facility under construction north of Home Depot on Highway 54, has its own website.



Go to

[www.hilltopgrandvillage.com](http://www.hilltopgrandvillage.com) to follow our progress. We have photos, videos, updates and more. You can also find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/HilltopGrandVillage](https://www.facebook.com/HilltopGrandVillage).

## Visitors at Easter events

Shelly planned parties at Alpine Terrace and Hilltop of Pepper to color eggs. Because the parties fell during spring break week, we invited children of employees and family members to join us at our afternoon events.

We colored eggs with dye and paint, had an egg hunt, played a game, colored Easter pictures and, of course, enjoyed a snack. The children especially enjoyed searching for hidden eggs filled with goodies.



EVERYONE FOUND EGGS DURING THE EASTER EGG HUNT AT HILLTOP OF PEPPER.

You can watch a video of our egg-dyeing at Alpine

Terrace here: <https://youtu.be/a8ZV-IID-gA>

You can see photos from our Easter festivities at Hilltop of Pepper here:

[www.facebook.com/HilltopAffiliates/posts/945970722176671](https://www.facebook.com/HilltopAffiliates/posts/945970722176671)

We hope you had a blessed and happy Easter.

Welcome spring!

## Take me out to the ballgame

Hilltop Enrichment Coordinator Shelly is planning an outing to see the Rrafters baseball team play at 7:05 p.m. Thursday, June 30. If we can get at least 10 people in our group, we get the group rate of \$12, which includes game ticket, a hot dog and soda.

We'd love to take some of our residents. If you are a family member of a resident, and you'd like to attend with your loved one, RSVP to the office at 715-423-7400 by May 6.



## Happy birthday!

We celebrate birthdays each month with a cake and party at our facilities.

- Minnette, April 3
- Daniel, April 6

