

Dementia Communication 'on Steroids' in the Time of COVID

Presented for:



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Presented by:



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Part 1 Introductions & Background

- **Introductions**
- **Erin Bonitto, M.S., A.D.C.**
 - Founder & Lead Coach of Gemini Consulting, Inc.
 - Dementia Educator & Dementia Communication Coach
- **Background**
- **Philosophy**
- **About today's webinar & format**
- **Special thanks**

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How and why today's session was developed...

Hands-on Coaching for very specific dementia communication skills



Maintenance personnel practice how to enter and leave a room or a memory care area without triggering anxiety or suspicion.

*Eddy Memorial Geriatric Center
Troy, NY*



CNAs practice how to use 'Endorphin Boosts' prior to bath to increase acceptance (and pleasure!) of the bathing experience.

*St. James Place
Baton Rouge, LA*



CNAs & Nurses practice quickly responding to a person standing-up unsafely – using positive statements and a non-scolding approach

*Minnesota Veterans Home
Luverne, MN*

So many of our best dementia communication strategies involve **specific skills** that are impacted during this time of COVID



Skills that Increase Understanding may be Impacted

- Vocal quality may be muffled by masks,
- Vocal quality may be distorted by 'echo' in face shields,
- Lip-reading is not possible due to masks,
- Lip-reading may be more difficult due to glare from face shields,
- Statements become 'lengthier' (and less clear) as the care provider tries to explain all these new things.

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Skills that Build Trust may be Impacted:

- A sparkling, warm facial expression may be obscured by a mask,
- Hugs, blowing kisses and other affectionate touch may not be safe or permitted,
- Hand shakes and holding hands may not be safe or permitted,
- A sense of 'playfulness' may be diminished if the care partner feels stressed.

Plus, our appearance in PPE may cause apprehension, anxiety, distrust – and trigger challenging behavioral symptoms.



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Key Point

So as care providers, we are finding it challenging to use these dementia communication skills effectively – during a time when we need **masterful dementia communication skills more than ever!**

We need dementia communication skills **'on steroids'** – so to speak – because of the potential triggers associated with PPE and the major disruption in routines that many of our elders are experiencing during this time of COVID-19.

Disruption for Persons with Dementia during COVID-19

- Meal-time experience and location may be completely different,
- Reduced opportunities for socialization with peers,
- No longer visits from families, friends and volunteers,
- Person may be moved to a new room or an entirely new household or area,
- Person may no longer be served by their trusted care partner,
- and more...

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Part 2

Basic Dementia Communication Skills that we need to do even more masterfully during the time of COVID-19

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Basic Skills that increase understanding (and decrease frustration)

1. Vocal quality

- Avoid Up-Talking!
- Down-Talking:
 - Starts at a medium pitch/frequency,
 - Steps downward with each word.
- Focusing Voice:
 - Includes down-talking, plus...
 - Each word is well enunciated & crisp,
 - Just a little bit slower than our normal rate of speech,
 - Just a little bit louder than our normal volume (but not shouting!)
 - Most importantly: There is a 'bright energy' to the words!
- Coaching Tips:
 - Use the hand!
 - Emphasize that this is not robotic and can be enthusiastic!

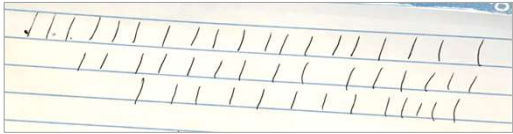


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Basic Skills that increase understanding (and decrease frustration)

2. Simple Statements

- Be sure your team members understand the impact of language processing difficulties.
- Example: Counting Exercise
- Handling Objections:
 - "I don't feel right about 'ordering' them to do something."
 - "We were always taught to give them choices."



- Middle-of-the-road guideline: 7 words or less.
- Phrased as a statement, not a question.
- Pause, pause ... Allow time for person to process and respond to the statement.
- (Responses may be verbal or non-verbal)

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Examples of Simple Statements

Guiding to the Bathroom

Instead of:

"Are you ready to go to the bathroom?"

"Come on, you have to go to the bathroom now!"

Try:

"Let's go for a walk..."

"Let's stretch our legs..."

"Let's wash-up."

"I'll help you wash-up."

"Let's freshen-up."

"Let's use the restroom."

"I know where the men's room is..."

Assisting at Meal-Time

Instead of:

"Can you take another bite?"

"Can you eat a little more?"

Try:

"It's homemade meatloaf tonight!"

"Tell me how it tastes!"

"Try this bite..." [pause]

"It's the crispy part!"

"Try these potatoes..." [pause]

"They have extra butter!"

"Try these green beans..." [pause]

"I think they added bacon!"

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Basic Skills that build trust

1. Warm, sparkling facial expression

- Quick Exercise for Team Members:
 - Task face,
 - Pleasant, professional face,
 - Sparkling face.
- Coaching Tips:
 - During COVID-19, simplify to just Task Face vs. Sparkling Face,
 - Grounding Breath,
 - Common Objections.



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Basic Skills that build trust

2. Body Positioning and Establish Eye Contact before Speaking or Touching

- Down below eye level
 - Crouch (if this works for you),
 - Chair (is a-okay!),
 - Slight knee bend (if that's the only option)
- Coaching Tips:
 - Common objections
 - Safety distance
 - Understand why
 - Zip it!



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Part 3

Strategies for Minimizing Triggers when Wearing Mask, Face Shield, Gown and/or Gloves



Imagine you have dementia. You don't know exactly where you are at – or who these people are around you. Now, a person who looks like this comes into your world.

You can't quite make-out who he is with his face covered like this. He is talking, but it's hard to understand what he is saying behind that mask.

You might wonder:

- Why is he wearing all this stuff?
- Why is he wearing gloves?!
- What on earth is he planning to do to me?
- Is there something wrong with me?
- Did something happen to me?
- Am I in a hospital!?
- Are they taking me into surgery!?

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Examples of Well-Intentioned Statements that May Actually Increase Worry or Frustration for the Person with Dementia:

- "You don't want to get sick, do you?"
- "I have to wear this so I don't get you sick."
- "Everybody's getting sick. You don't want to get sick, do you?"
- "You don't want to catch this cold / flu / virus!"
- "You know I have to wear this!"
- "You know it's me!"
- "You know who I am! What's my name?"

Examples of Positive Wording – delivered in a 'light-hearted' way:

- "I'm just wearing this to follow the rules..." [pause] "They're always coming up with something new!"
- "I guess this is the new uniform!" [pause] "I think I liked the old one better!"
- "It looks like I'm dressed for outer space!"

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Examples of Simple Statements to Help Build Rapport:

- "I'm wearing my big mask..." [pause for response] "It's covering-up my smile!"
- "I'm wearing my crazy mask..." [pause for response] "I'm sorry you can't see my smile!"
- "I'm wearing my weird mask..." [pause for response] "I'm pretty good looking under here!"
- "I'm wearing the newest fashions..." [pause for response] "Pretty nice, huh?"
- "I'm wearing my fancy ballgown today..." [pause for response] "Pretty nice, huh?"
- "I've got these gloves on today..." [pause for response] "I promise this won't hurt!"
- "This is my big paper dress..." [pause for response] "But it's still me under here!"
- "My name is Sarah..." [pause] "I'm a nurse here." [pause] "But, I kind-of look like an alien today!"
- "My name is Jim..." [pause for response] "I'm your helper today." [pause for response] "I'm not as scary as I look in all this!"
- "You ought to see me dance in this thing!"



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Using "Endorphin Boosts"

- What is an Endorphin Boost?
- Endorphin Boost vs. Pleasantry,
- Intentionality,
- Individualized lists of Endorphin Boosts,
- Who benefits?
- How do we do this during the time of COVID?

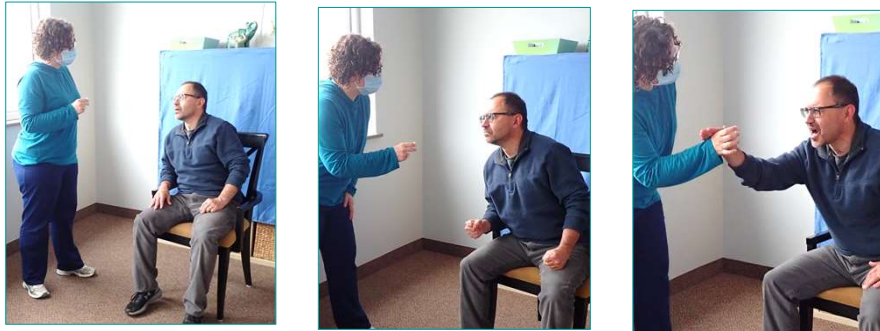


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Part 4 Some Real-Life Situations

Giving Medication: Version 1

Using pleasant, every day communication skills



- What were some of the 'nuggets of reality' in this scenario?
- The team member was very pleasant. But what things did she do or not do that contributed to this outcome?
- Was his response a 'behavior' or a rational response that any of us might have in the same situation?

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Giving Medication: Version 2

Using intentional dementia communication skills



- What were some of the intentional dementia communication skills you identified in this scenario?
- Coaching Tips: Handling Common Objections & Concerns
- Experiences with this approach

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Housekeeper Entering Apartment: Version 1

Using pleasant, every day communication skills



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(continued)



- What were some of the 'nuggets of reality' in this scenario? What effect might a mask have?
- What are some of the many things we might have in our hand as we live a person's room or apartment?
- What behavioral challenges might we observe, following this interaction?
- The housekeeper was very pleasant.
But what things did she do or not do that contributed to this outcome?

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Housekeeper Entering Apartment: Version 2

Using intentional dementia communication skills



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(continued)



- What were some of the intentional dementia communication skills you identified in this scenario?
- Coaching Tips: What about Time?
- Experiences with this approach

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Part 5

Dementia Communication Skills when Facilitating Video Chats

Potential Challenges for Some Persons with Dementia



- Inability to focus on the screen,
- Not able to understand that it is their loved one is on the screen,
- Not able to hear or understand their loved one,
- Believing their loved one is actually there (behind the screen),
- Feeling disappointed,
- Feeling 'tricked,'
- Unable to answer the questions their loved one is asking,
- Their loved one, trying desperately to connect, is simply talking too much or asking too many questions,
- Too many people on the screen at once.

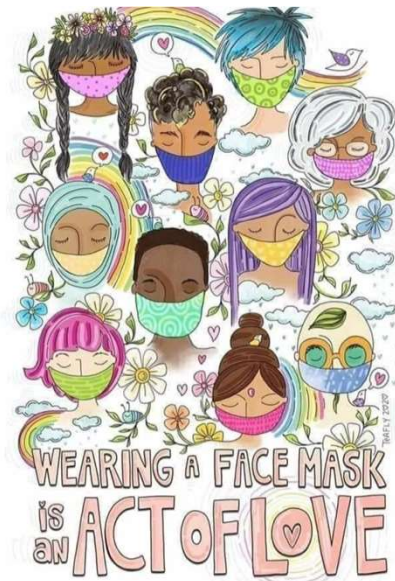
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Potential Strategies for a Less-Stressful and More Enjoyable Video Chat

- An area free of distractions (consider sight lines, lighting and sounds),
- Team member understanding their role as a facilitator,
- Think of the skills you would use when facilitating a small group, or facilitating a person's engagement with a sensory video,
- Gaining the person's attention and focus,
- Paraphrasing
 - ✓ Vocal Quality
 - ✓ Simple Statements (and re-framing questions if needed)
 - ✓ Pauses
- Become comfortable with silence,
- Coaching for family members ahead of time
"Something we've found helpful is..."
- 1 person on the screen at a time,
- When necessary, instead of a traditional video chat, facilitate a pleasurable observation.

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Sharing Experiences
Q&A
Wrapping Up



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About the Presenter

As the Founder and Lead Coach of Gemini Consulting, Erin Bonitto provides hands-on dementia communication coaching at partner communities across the nation, including skilled nursing homes, assisted living centers and memory care providers. Using the 'Buddies Forever Dementia Communication Coaching System,' Erin's partner communities learn how to provide persons with dementia the gifts of pleasure, purpose and peace – while making measurable impacts on clinical and operational goals related to psychotropic use, behavioral outcomes, fall rates, team member morale and family satisfaction. These projects have been grant-funded in several states and described by providers as their 'missing link' to culture transformation. Her educational background includes an M.S. in Gerontology and an Activity Director Certification – but her true education began with jobs in dietary and caregiving, throughout her high school and college years. When Erin is not providing coaching, she can be found as a popular featured speaker at aging services conferences. She has been described as a speaker who "can bring tears to your eyes and make you laugh out loud," all while delivering real-world, nuts and bolts tools that participants can put to use immediately.



Thank You

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