

Do's and Don'ts: Language When Speaking to Someone With Dementia

The language used surrounding dementia has been largely negative, creating a focus around weaknesses and loss. In order to transform the way dementia is viewed, we must focus on using more person-centered language to reduce discrimination and to have a stronger focus on the person, not the disease.

Don't

Demented – This term as well as terms such as 'senile' create a negative image surrounding dementia. It implies the person is completely incapable.

Adult Day Care – The term day care is most often used regarding child care services, making it not a great fit for older adults. The term adult day care may even be taken as offensive.

Nursing Home / Institution – These terms have both been known to have negative implications and both sound more medically focused.

Aggressive – This or any other negative term regarding behavior should be avoided. These terms aren't specific and could be mistaken for a personality trait not an effect of the disease.

Caregiver Burden – Using this term may imply that caregiving is always a burden. However, individual caregivers have different experiences while caregiving and interpret it in their own way.

Early Onset Dementia – While this term is unlikely to cause a negative image of dementia, it is often confused with the early stages of dementia.

Do

Person Living with Dementia – This term puts a stronger focus on the person than the disease, and doesn't give the negative impression that the person is incapable.

Adult Day Program – This term doesn't focus as much on the care aspect of the program making it seem much more relaxed.

Long Term Care Home – This term has less negative implications and sounds a lot more home-like.

Change in Behavior – This term is much more specific and allows people to understand that the negative behaviors are part of the impact dementia has on the person.

Effects of Caregiving – Using effects as opposed to burden removes the belief that caregiving is always a burden and allows for caregivers to have their own interpretations.

Young Onset Dementia – Using young onset dementia is clearer and helps reduce confusion.