

# BETTER CARE

10 QUICK TIPS FOR YOUR DEMENTIA CARE JOURNEY.



## TIP #1

**B.A.M.B.U**

Believe affection means better understanding. If we take the time to understand as much as we can about dementia, not only can we provide better care for our partners, but we can also preserve dignity, control, and peace of mind for all individuals involved. Imagine how much better life could be if you were no longer arguing with your partner and instead were learning how to properly plan for the future while also discovering new ways to connect with your partner. That would be life-changing, right? What if you were also able to find balance in not only caring for your partner but in caring for yourself as well? That sounds good, doesn't it? Believe it or not, it is possible! The first step down that pathway is to educate yourself about dementia.

There are a number of resources you can use to educate yourself on all things dementia: *(here are just a few)*

- Bambu Treehouse (All-in-One Dementia Care Library)  
([letsbambu.com/treehouse](https://letsbambu.com/treehouse))
- Bambu Care's YouTube Channel ([youtube.com/bambucare](https://youtube.com/bambucare))
- Alzheimer's Association ([Alz.org](https://Alz.org))
- Books (Top 3 Recommendations):

**With Intent** by Bre'anna Wilson (Bambu Care)

Creating Moments of Joy by Jolene Brackey

The 36-Hour Day by Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins

**TIP #2****THE TRUTH IS SUBJECTIVE**

How would you define the truth? How do you know if something is actually true? How much does the truth matter? These are important questions to consider. However, I'm going to spoil it for you. When it comes to dementia care, the truth is subjective and the "actual" truth does not matter.

To put this idea into perspective, imagine, your partner is sitting next to you and starts telling you about how they met Oprah. They give such detail and you see their face just light up reminiscing about the time they met Oprah. Now, you know they've never met Oprah—not recently nor in the past. So, what do you do? Do you cut her off and say, "What? Mom, no you didn't! You have never met that woman."? NOOOOOO! Most definitely not! Does it really matter whether your mother has met Oprah or not? Nope, it does not.

Let's try another example. What if your partner accuses you of stealing their wallet? Your partner says, "You stole my wallet! I know you did. I saw you in here earlier messing with my things." Of course, you know you haven't touched his wallet and when you were in his room maybe you were just putting away folded laundry or maybe you weren't in his room at all. So, what do you do? Do you say, "I can't believe you! How dare you accuse me of stealing your wallet."? NOOOOOO! That's a sure way to just make matters worse. Does it really matter whether your dad thinks you stole his wallet? No! What is the real issue at hand? The wallet is missing (likely because he misplaced it) and your dad is upset about it. So, how can you resolve this? You could offer to try to help dad find it. If you know where the wallet is, you could bring it to him and apologize for moving it, even if you had nothing to do with the location it ended up in.

We are on a roll. Let's do one last example. What if your partner says, "I want to go home." What do you do? Do you say, "But, you are home! This is your house." or what about "You moved in with me 2 years ago, don't you remember?" NOOOOO! That's a sure way to freak anybody out or at least piss them off. Let's switch the roles real quick. You are at a friend's house. Maybe you've only been there for 30 minutes or maybe it's been 3 hours and you say, "I want to go home." But your friend says, "What! You just got here. You can't go home yet." Does that change your feeling of wanting to go home? Likely not! What are reasons you would want to go home? Maybe you just are not enjoying yourself, maybe it's too hot in the house and it has you feeling uncomfortable, maybe your stomach or head hurts and you just want to go home, or maybe you realized there's something important you need to take care of at home. There could be many reasons why you would want to go home.

Similarly, there may be many reasons why your partner is telling you they want to go home. Maybe they are tired and would like to go "home" to rest, maybe they are not having a good time, maybe they are feeling lonely, maybe they are experiencing a perceived threat and feel uncomfortable. Whatever the case, whatever they are feeling, they want to go home. So, what is the issue here? Does it matter that they are already home or that they will never go home? Nope! Honestly, if you were to take them to their actual house, they would likely still tell you, "I want to go home." What is the real issue? The issue is that for some reason they do not feel "at home" and they are seeking what home represents—happiness, safety, comfort, predictability, peace. Remember, home is rarely a physical place that your partner is seeking. Home is a desired feeling that they are seeking. Therefore, your response must appeal to those feelings. Acknowledge the feelings behind the desire to go home, meet the need, and reassure them of their safety. If it becomes too distressing, divert the conversation—food, music, walking, pictures, etc.

The idea of “right versus wrong” or “truth versus lie” or “reality vs fiction” is easy to get caught up in. If your partner states something you know to be inaccurate or believe to be false, instead of insisting that they are wrong or stating unwelcomed “facts,” ask yourself if it matters whether what they are saying is true or not. If the answer is no, it really doesn’t matter—simply let it go. Please avoid arguing. Instead, join them in their reality and/or respond to the underlying feelings of the words they are saying.

---

**TIP #3****SMILE, AND OFTEN**

Did you know that your approach often sets the tone for an interaction? Our attitude and body language are strong communicators and often speak louder than words. Because those with dementia often retain the ability to pick up on non-verbals, we must be mindful of our tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures. It is not just about what we say, but how we say it, and how we look when we say it. It is not uncommon for someone with dementia to mirror the emotions of someone else in their presence. Unfortunately, this goes for both negative and positive emotions. So, our recommendation is to choose the positive. Of course, this is easier said than done, but a simple smile could be the only trick up your sleeve you need to facilitate more positive interactions.

If your patience has gotten short and you're not in a chipper mood, try taking deep SLOW breaths—in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to count to 4 on the inhale and another 4 on the exhale. Repeat this 3-5 times until you feel just a bit better. Then, approach your partner...with a smile, of course! 😊

Avoid:

- crossing arms
- rolling eyes
- smacking lips
- clicking tongue
- hovering over them
- approaching from behind or the side
- moving hurriedly
- speaking quickly
- yelling or scolding
- patronizing behaviors

**TIP #4****STOP AND LISTEN**

Life can be busy and we can often feel like we are always on “go go go.” Although those with dementia often have a difficult time communicating, if you take a moment to slow down and really try to listen and understand, you will see just how much you can learn about how your partner feels and what they need. Often times, those living with dementia are not just speaking with words, but with emotions. If you are in too quick of a hurry, you may miss settle, but important details that hint to you that some need is currently being unmet for your partner.

It can be easy to ignore your partner if it's the 23rd time they have asked you the same question or told you the same story, but please —don't. For them, it is as if they are asking or telling you for the first time. Switch places real quick. How would you feel if you really wanted to know something or tell someone something and they flat out ignored you or even worse...snapped at you? It would probably be a pretty icky feeling.

Avoid dismissive speech:

- "if you say so"
- "just stop talking"
- "enough already"
- "whatever"
- "uh huh"
- "mhm"
- "yeah, sure"
- "oh"
- "to each his own"
- "there's nothing to cry about"

**TIP #5****PERSON OVER TASK**

Have you ever heard of this reference—person over task or person first, then task? What does that actually mean and what might that look like in action? To put it simply, it means to tend to the human in your partner first. When it comes to getting a task done, such as bathing, dressing, or eating, you may find it much more productive if you deprioritize the task and prioritize the person. Tune into their needs and desires first. Are their basic needs met? Is there anything they were wanting to do before you came into the room or into their space? Even if your partner is less verbal, greet them with a smile. Tell them what you are doing and what you plan on doing before just jumping right into the task—ask them for permission.

Once you have taken the time to acknowledge them as a person who has feelings, needs, desires, and preferences, then you can ease into the task by asking them to come with you or to participate in some activity whether it is changing clothes, going to the bathroom, taking a shower, coming to the table for breakfast, etc. Tune into their verbal and non-verbal behavior. If the task or interaction becomes too distressing for your partner, change your approach or end the task! If your partner absolutely refuses to participate or becomes too distressed, you can always revisit the task later. There is nothing wrong with taking a step back and trying again later. If you force a task upon your partner without acknowledging their wants and needs, you may come head to head with a lot of resistance. This could create an onward spiral of difficulty and negative interactions.

Unfortunately, emotional memory lasts much longer than event memory. That means, emotions can continue to linger beyond the event that triggered them. These emotions can then impact further engagements and interactions.



**TIP #6****GIVE CHOICES, BUT ONLY 2**

Most people have a strong need to feel at least partially in control and like they have a say. However, sometimes those with dementia can struggle to verbalize their desires. If this is your partner, giving them options is a good way to allow them opportunities for autonomy. However, giving too many options can be overwhelming and confusing. Try limiting their options to just two. For example: Would you like to take your shower now or after lunch? Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt? Do you want eggs or oatmeal? Do you want to watch the Price is Right or Gunsmoke? If they happen to pick something outside of the two options you give them and you can make it possible, do it!

How would you feel if everyday someone decided what time you woke up, what you wore, what you ate, when you took a shower, what channel you could watch, and what time you had to go to bed? Oh and on top of that, every time you made a preference known, it was as if no one was listening. "I want ice cream." "Where's my watch? I need my watch." "I like to shower before bed." "No, I don't like that." Wouldn't that be terrible? Unfortunately, this is what we tend to do to those who have dementia. If they begin to have difficulty in communicating their wants and desires we start taking over and making choices for them. We try to convince them to shower at an odd time. We go into the closet and pick out what they are going to wear. We cook whatever we want to cook for meals. We tell them to sit down if they are pacing around too much or getting into things.

Some people living with dementia can be very "go with the flow," but for others, this may create depression, apathy, loneliness, resentment, resistance, or even aggression.

## TIP #7

# CONTRAST, CONTRAST

As dementia progresses, depth perception (ability to judge distances between objects) worsens as well as contrast sensitivity (ability to detect differences in colors). This can result in misperceptions of the environment, difficulty locating objects, or inability to discern stairs and thresholds. When possible, try to use contrasting colors. What does contrasting colors mean? Contrasting colors are colors that stand out from one another.

If you put a white shirt on white or gray bedding your partner may not be able to find it. A white toilet in a bathroom with white flooring and white walls can seemingly blend in. If they can't find the toilet, men may have a hard time with accuracy, not realizing where the toilet starts and ends. Others, may be afraid to sit down thinking they may fall through the toilet. If you put water in a clear cup, spaghetti on a red plate, or rice in a white bowl your partner may have a difficult time with self-feeding.

Avoid:

- patterned plates, rugs, furniture, or linens
- dark-colored or black rugs or tiling

Ways to increase contrast: *(just a few)*

- red toilet seat
- red non-skid mat at the bottom of a white shower or tub floor
- contrasting anti-slip tape at edge of each stair
- placing a colored towel on bed for white/light-colored clothing

These small changes could make a world of difference in your partner's ability to navigate and function in their environment.

**TIP #8****MUSIC IS FOR EVERYONE**

No matter what stage your partner with dementia may be in, music can be a very powerful tool. The parts of the brain responsible for music and rhythm are one of the last affected by dementia. Music can provide joy, comfort, and decrease anxiety. If your partner is feeling agitated or anxious, try playing music that you know or think your partner would enjoy. Please be mindful of the volume though. If it's too low they may not be able to hear it, but if it's too loud it could be overwhelming which could increase agitation or anxiety. You can ask them if the volume is good or you can observe their body language to get the feedback and answers you need.

You can also use rhythm and music as a part of daily activities. Some people find it easier to walk when they have a rhythm to follow. You can also do exercises with your partner to the beat of the music, if they are interested. Maybe they would prefer a little dancing, clapping of the hands, or tapping of the foot. Do you have any musical instruments around—maracas, tambourines, drums, piano? Put those to use! Music can also provide a calm relaxing environment for bathing and can help ease sundowning behaviors.

The biggest key to using music is to be sure it fits with your partner's musical preferences. Pay attention to their body language and any non-verbal behaviors. Make adjustments as necessary. You may even consider instrumentals over music with words.

---

**TIP #9****SEEK SUPPORT**

Sometimes, we think we have to go through the dementia care journey alone, but we don't. Even if your family isn't stepping up or your friends are disappearing, find an online or in-person support group, call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 hotline (800 272 3900) for advice and support, identify local resources that can help provide respite care, or reach out to Bambu Care — we are always here to help any way we can.

Feel free to download our [Ultimate Resource Guide for Dementia Caregivers](#), join our free support community—[Bambu Care Champions](#), or reach out to us via email at: [hello@letsbambu.com](mailto:hello@letsbambu.com).

---

## TIP #10

# BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

The dementia care journey is by no means an easy one. There will be many ups and downs and you may make a lot of “mistakes.” It is important to forgive yourself and learn from it. Apologize to your partner if it feels like the right thing to do and move on. Beating yourself up about something you may or may have not done will only hinder you. Your only job is to do the best you can. As long as you are doing that—pat yourself on the back. You are doing just fine.

Please also remember to take care of yourself. Self-care is so important and must not be taken lightly. You must find a way to balance caring for your partner with caring for yourself. This journey can take an ugly turn quite easily, if you let it. Many care partners experience feeling overwhelmed, defeated, guilty, both physically and emotionally exhausted, and even resentful.

If this is you now or you feel this may be you soon, I strongly encourage you to consider investing in our "Grow with Gratitude" journal for dementia care partners. This journal was specifically created to help people just like you uncover the beauty that can lie within even the toughest journeys. We want you to be able to find the good in your days, connect with your partner in new ways, and find balance in caring for yourself while caring for your partner.



## Grow with Gratitude 100-Day Gratitude & Self-Care Journal

[CLICK FOR MORE DETAILS](#)

“

DO YOUR BEST.  
THEN REPEAT.

# THE END

MAY YOU EMBRACE THE JOURNEY AHEAD OF YOU.

**For More Dementia Tips:**

