

RISE TOGETHER

A QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



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Words That Matter: Honoring Change With Dignity and Truth

As autumn settles in with its vibrant colors and quiet transitions, we're reminded that change, though sometimes difficult, can also bring clarity and growth. Just as trees let go of their leaves to prepare for renewal, dementia care asks us to release assumptions and embrace new ways of connecting. One of the most powerful tools we have is our language.

This issue of RISE Together invites you to reflect on how the words we choose can shape dignity, safety, identity, and trust for those living with dementia. Words matter. *Let's choose them with care.*

Language Shapes Experience

Words can soothe, or they can create distress. They can empower, or they can diminish. In dementia care, language is not neutral. It carries meaning that directly impacts how a person is perceived, engaged, and supported.

When we refer to someone as a "sufferer" or say they're "fading away," we unintentionally paint a picture of hopelessness. This is what many call the "tragedy narrative." Instead, we can shift to language that recognizes ability, identity, and humanity:

Instead of...

"He doesn't know who I am anymore."

Try saying...

"He might not say my name, but he smiles when I hold his hand."

As a family member or close friend, your words carry deep emotional weight. Choose ones that create calm, affirm identity, and invite connection—even in small moments.

Say My Name: Honoring Identity

Names are powerful. They anchor us to who we are and how we see ourselves. For someone living with dementia, especially in earlier stages or younger-onset cases, they may not recall being married or identify with their current last name. They may feel more like "Annie Miller" than "Mrs. Thompson."



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Using your loved one's preferred name affirms their sense of self and acknowledges their dignity. If they still call you by an old nickname or think of you as a sibling instead of a daughter or spouse—meet them there. Your relationship is still real, even if the roles shift.

Introduce Yourself—Every Time

Even when you're family, they may not always recognize you—and that's not a reflection of your bond. Offering a gentle, consistent introduction helps your loved one feel safe.

"Hi Mom, it's me, Maureen. I brought your favorite book."

Introductions aren't about reminding them of what they've lost—they're about reducing anxiety and making the moment feel warm and familiar.

What If They Don't Believe You?

Sometimes your loved one may say, "You're not my daughter," or "You're not my husband." These moments can hurt, but they aren't personal. Their brain is working hard to make sense of time, memory, and connection.

Rather than correct, try:

- Affirm the emotion: "It feels a little confusing right now, doesn't it?"
- Reminisce gently: "You always made me feel so loved growing up. I think about that a lot."
- Offer a bridge: "Your daughter talks about how much she loves being with you."

You're still connecting—just in a different way.

Let's Talk About Fiblets

You may have heard the term "fiblet"—a small untruth meant to protect someone from a painful reality. While well-intentioned, fiblets can leave care partners feeling uneasy.

At RISE, we believe in relational truth-telling: staying emotionally attuned, speaking with kindness, and respecting your loved one's reality—even when it's different from your own.

Instead of: "Dad's just in the other room" (when he's passed away)

Try: "You really miss Dad. Tell me something you loved doing together."

Being truthful doesn't mean being blunt. It means staying connected in a way that feels safe and loving.

Words of Affirmation: Small Phrases, Big Impact

In your role as a family care partner, your words carry comfort, reassurance, and deep emotional memory. Here are phrases that can calm and affirm:

- "I'm here with you."
- "You're safe."
- "You make this house feel like home."
- "I love spending time with you."
- "You're doing the best you can—and so am I."

Even if your loved one can't reply, these words land.

A Season of Letting Go: Language That Lifts

Fall reminds us that letting go is part of the cycle of care. Let go of words that limit. Let go of outdated expectations. Let go of needing to be perfectly understood.

In their place, let's speak:

- Words that name what's possible, not just what's changed.
- Words that soften the hard moments, without pretending they're easy.
- Words that honor love in all its forms—even if it's expressed differently now.

The Heart of It All

As care partners, we know that words don't just describe a moment—they help create it. Your voice is often the anchor in your loved one's world. What you say—and how you say it—can shape the atmosphere of an entire day. So speak gently. Speak with hope. And most of all, speak from love. Because even when memories fade, the warmth of your words remains.

*"I've learned that people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did, but people will never
forget how you made them feel."*
— Maya Angelou

A NOTE FROM MAUREEN

RISE Reflection: *The Words That Hold Us*

Language is more than just communication—it's connection. As care partners, professionals, friends, and family members, we hold enormous power in our words. Let's use that power to lift up, to orient, and to remind people who they are—not who they were.

This season, may your words be soft like falling leaves, sturdy like branches, and warm like a favorite sweater. Speak life. Speak kindness. Speak truth.

Looking for support? Reach out. Let's navigate this together.

WHAT'S NEW AT RISE DEMENTIA CARE

New on the Blog:

Looking for deeper reflection and fresh perspective? Explore our newest blog posts:

When Grief Arrives Too Soon: Naming the Unspoken Loss in Dementia Care

A heartfelt exploration of anticipatory grief, ambiguous loss, and the emotional layers that come with caring for someone who is changing before your eyes.

What the POINTER Study Tells Us About Taking Charge of Brain Health

A look at the latest research on lifestyle interventions, brain health, and what we can do to protect cognition across the lifespan.

Read more at: www.risedementiacare.com/blog

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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Community Voices Matter: Take the Bergen County Dementia Survey

Your voice can help shape a more informed, supportive, and inclusive community.

We're gathering insights on how Bergen County residents understand dementia symptoms and available resources. Whether you are living with dementia, supporting someone who is, or simply care about building a more dementia-friendly community, your input is essential.

 The survey takes just 5–7 minutes, and responses will be used to guide future programs and services.

 [Take the Survey Here](https://survey.zohopublic.com/zs/MqB13W)
<https://survey.zohopublic.com/zs/MqB13W>

 Open to Bergen County residents age 18+ who can read English.

Let's raise awareness together and strengthen support for those navigating brain change.