

How Speech Therapy Supports Persons with Dementia

VIRTUAL DEMENTIA WITH SANDERS BROWN

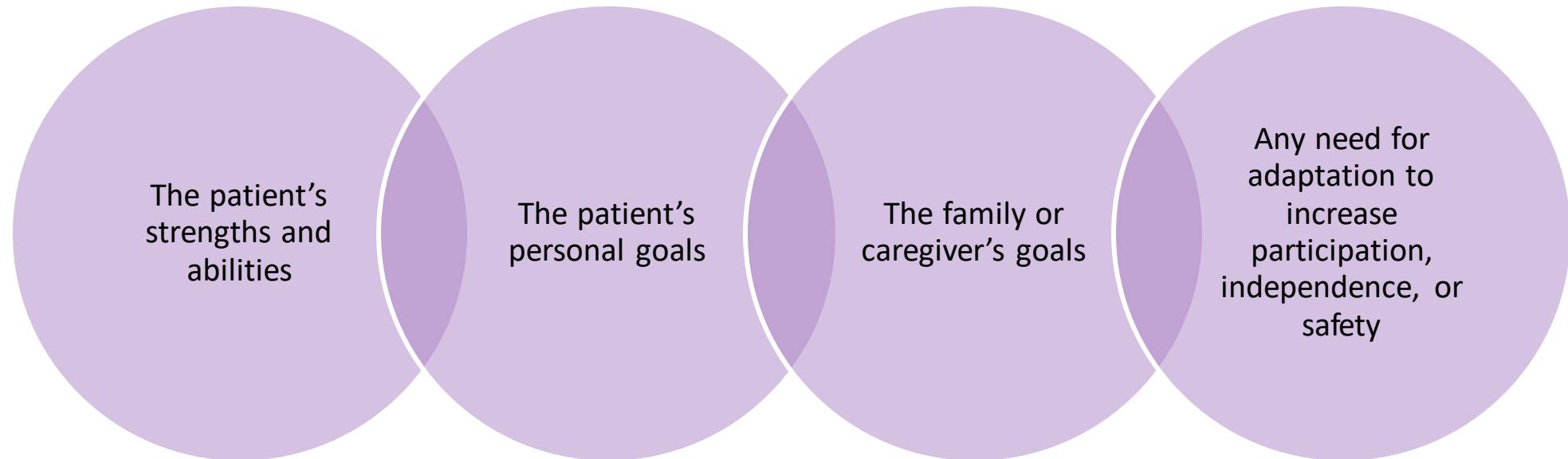
NOVEMBER 18, 2025

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Why should I consider Speech Therapy for myself or my loved one?

- ❖ To reduce anxiety about your diagnosis and functioning
- ❖ To empower patients and care partners with knowledge
- ❖ To support informed decision-making for the individual and their family and caregivers
- ❖ To promote healthy behaviors
- ❖ To improve the quality of life for the individual and their care partners
- ❖ Having no intervention may lead to excess disability

What will the Speech Therapist evaluate?



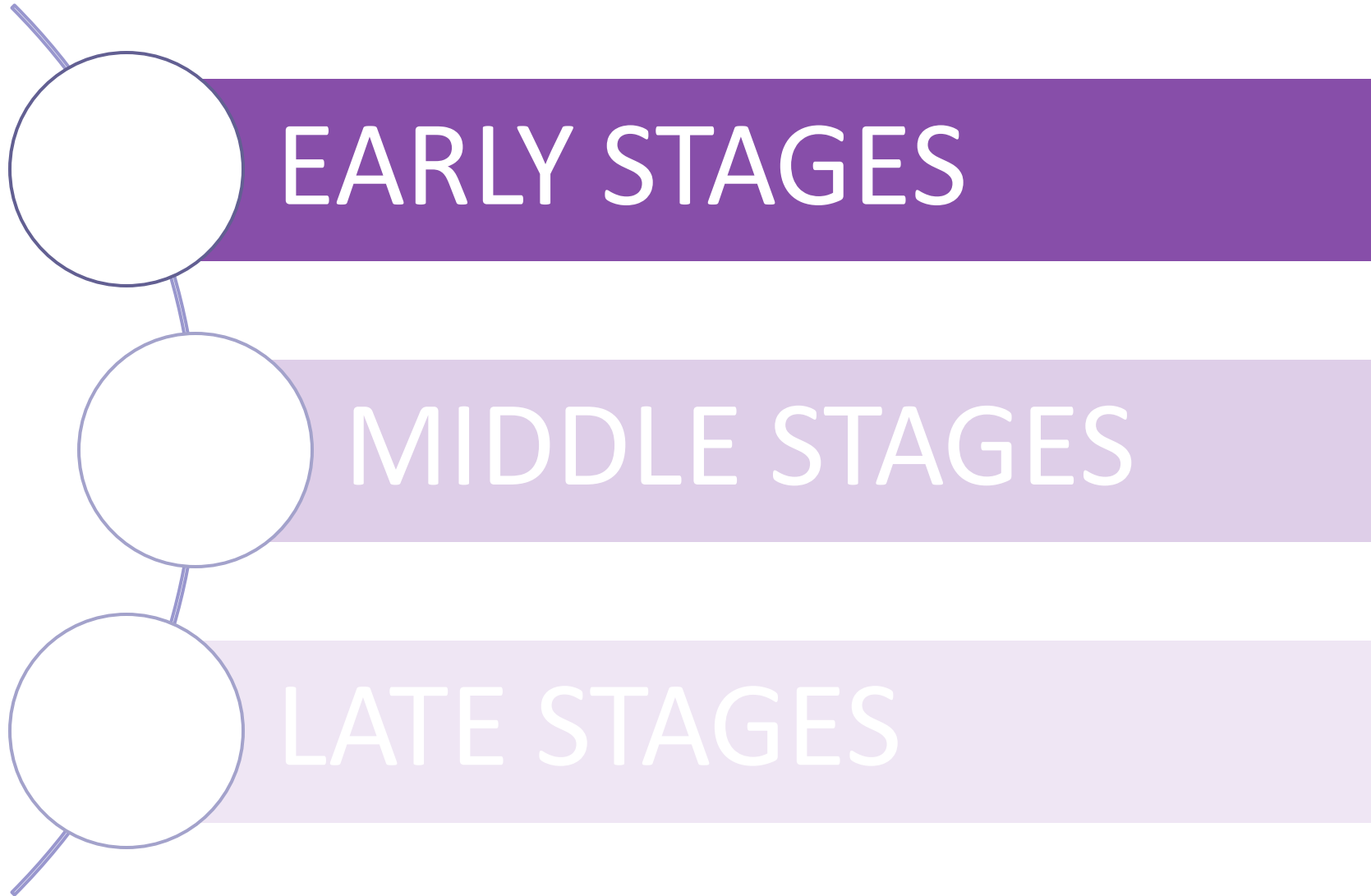
Two Approaches in Speech Therapy

Direct Therapy Approach

- 1:1 with the patient
- This type of therapy will occur in earlier stages of dementia when new learning is possible or when the patient can implement a strategy independently or with set up support

Caregiver/Family education and training

- The purpose is to help care partners to know how to support the patient's quality of life and independence



Early Stages - Characteristics

Changes may include:	
Cognition and Memory	▪ Able to learn and implement supports/strategies independently or with set up assistance ▪ Needs to rely on supports/strategies rather than “just remembering” ▪ Difficulty concentrating, planning ahead, making decision, and problem solving ▪ Forgets recently learned information ▪ May misplace common items and be unable to retrace steps
Language and Communication	▪ Beginning to have some word finding difficulty or difficulty organizing thoughts ▪ Difficulty sequencing tasks ▪ Difficulty following conversation, especially when tired
Mood and Personality	▪ Increase irritability or anxiousness ▪ Becoming withdrawn ▪ Losing interest in hobbies and social activities ▪ Mood swings ▪ Depression
Daily Tasks	▪ May still be driving, living independently, working or volunteering, managing their home, medications, and appointments with some support or modifications

Early Stages — How can a speech therapist help?

Education	Counseling	Interventions
• About disease process • About signs & symptoms • Help develop a care team • Community resources • Family/caregiver training & education	• Coping with the disease process and changes experienced • Important planning conversations to have with family/care partners	• Developing tools, strategies and modifications to support memory (calendar, journaling, note-taking, list-making, organization, visual reminders) • Establishing routines and schedules • Identifying environments where you are most successful with cognitive skills and communication skills • Techniques for memory like spaced-retrieval • Possibly computer-based cognitive training programs

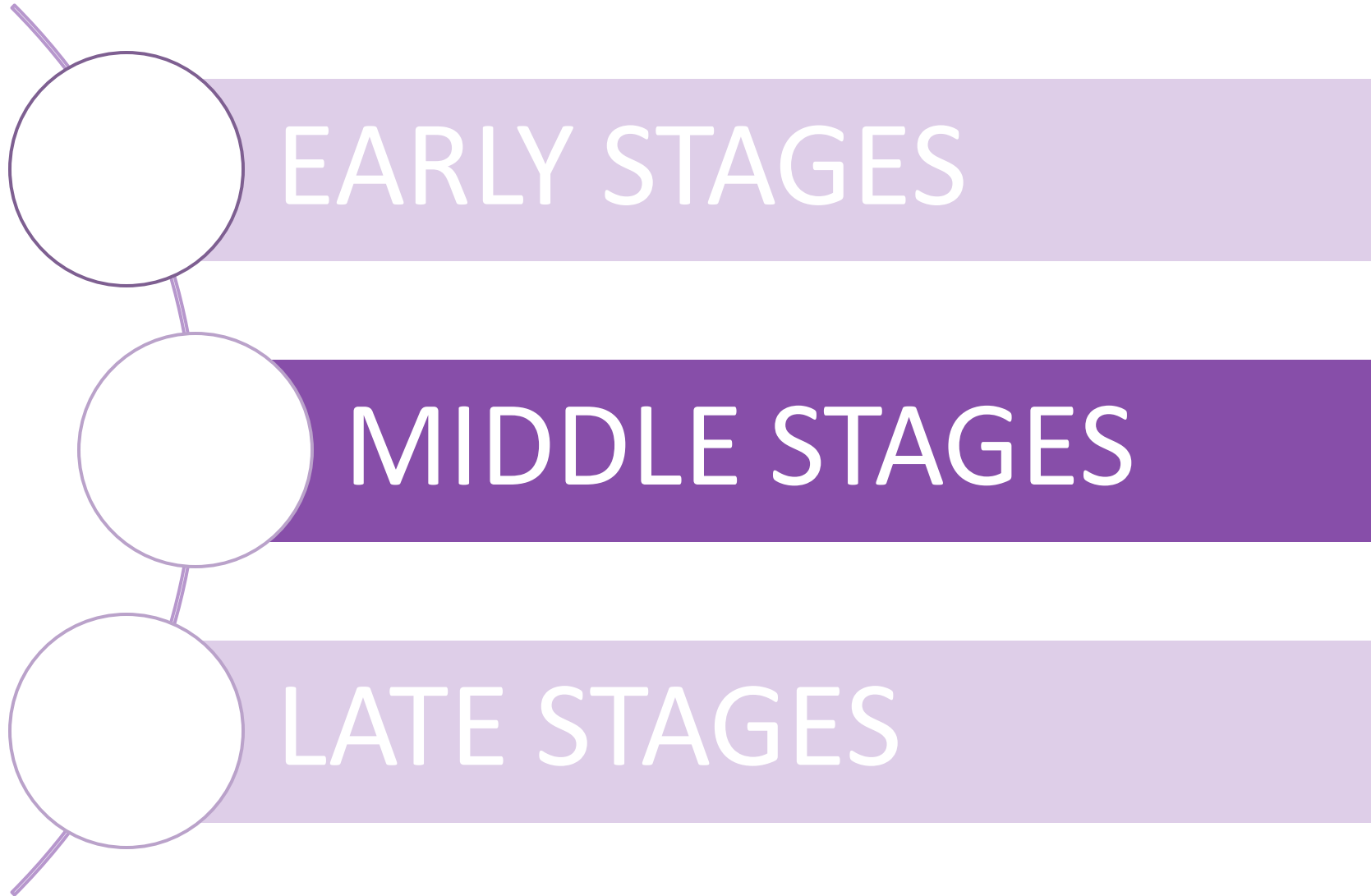
Early Stages - Considerations



To maximize the effects of therapy, it's important to be referred to speech therapy early in the disease process



A person in early stages may not be informed about how therapy can help or may be reluctant to admit or accept that they need help.



Middle Stages - Characteristics

Possible Changes With:	
Cognition and Memory	▪ More support needed to manage daily tasks including medications, finances, household tasks, and meal preparation ▪ Need assistance in the community (shopping, appointments, events, etc,) ▪ Difficulty remaining oriented to time, place, self, and task ▪ Difficulty or unable to recall information about themselves and others including personal information and recent events
Language and Communication	• More difficulty with word finding; may confuse words • Changes in ability to process and comprehend information read or heard • Difficulty initiating and maintaining conversation • Difficulty understanding humor • May experience changes with ability to read and write • May do or say things that are socially inappropriate
Mood and Personality	• Increased frustration • May have some challenging behaviors • Becomes moody or withdrawn, especially in social or mentally challenging situations • Possible increase of suspiciousness and delusions, or compulsive, repetitive behavior
Daily Tasks	▪ Requires assistance with the sequence of ADLs and IADL's ▪ Needs assistance ordering at a restaurant ▪ Increased tendency to wander or pace ▪ Changes in sleeping patterns

Middle Stages — How can a speech therapist help?

Education	Counseling	Interventions
• About disease process • Community resources • Family/caregiver training & education about supporting communication and cognition	• Engaging with purposeful and meaningful activities • Family/care partners assuming more management of day to day tasks • Behavior management	• Training and implementation of visual/written/verbal cues to support sequential tasks and memory • Advise and train on how to modify environments and conversations for communication success • Address supporting social interaction and participation with others and their environment

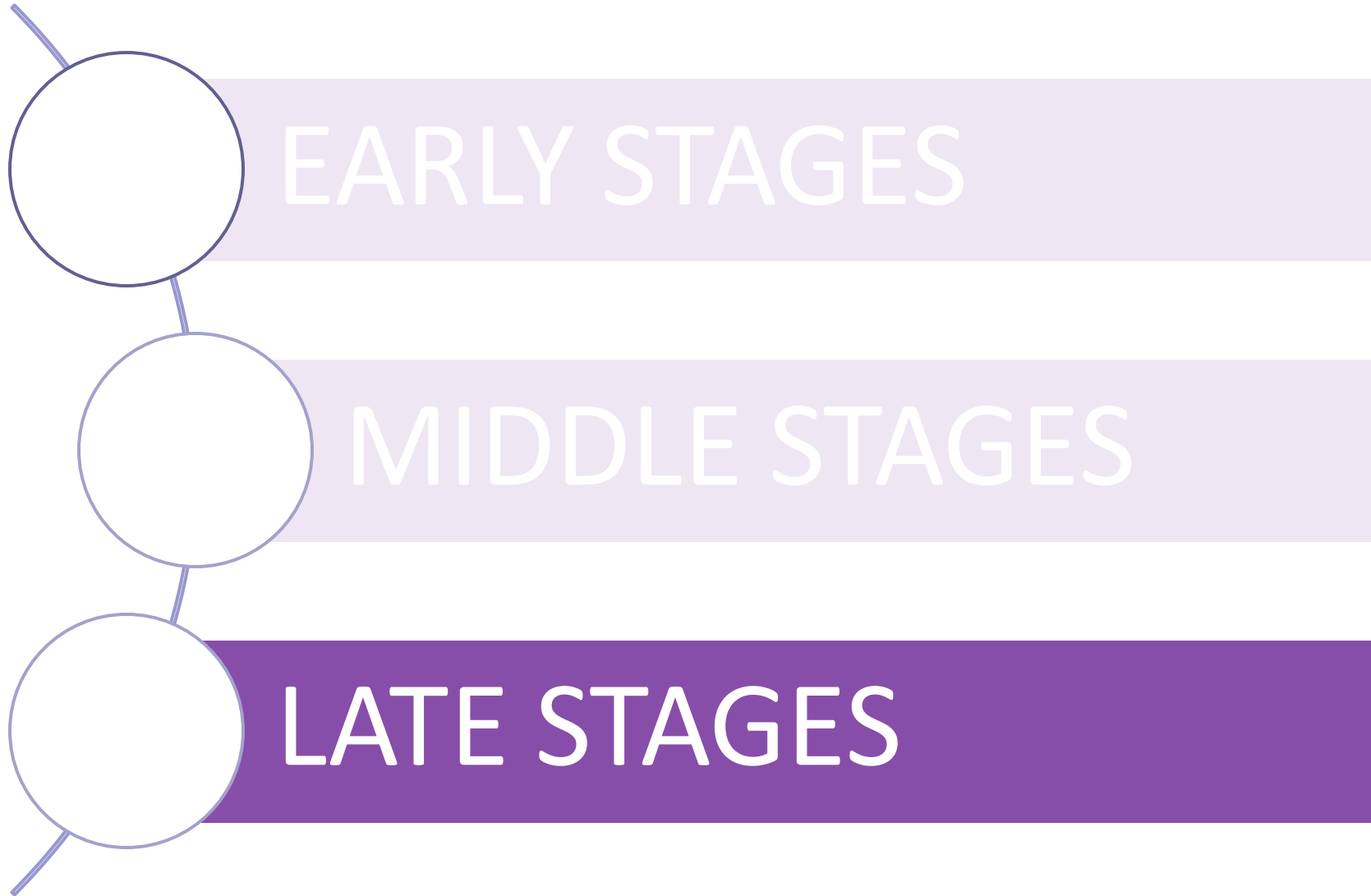
Middle Stages - Considerations



Care Partners will need to provide more support, training, and education



It is important for persons with dementia to remain engaged with purposeful and meaningful activities (ability based) related to personal interests that support a feeling of worth and value



Late Stages - Characteristics

Possible Changes With:	
Cognition and Memory	• Independent living is no longer possible • Possibly able to recall some personal information • Loss of awareness of recent experiences and of their surrounds
Language and Communication	• Significant difficulty with word finding • Difficulty initiating and maintaining conversation • Loss of reading and writing ability • Speech may be sometimes unintelligible • Difficulty following instructions
Mood and Personality	• Possible increase with behavior problems such as anger and suspiciousness • Depression
Daily Tasks	• Requires around-the-clock assistance with personal care • Needs assistance with adequate and proper food choices

Late Stages — How can a speech therapist help?

Education	Counseling	Interventions
• About disease process • Community resources • Family/caregiver/staff training & education regarding best means of communication, swallowing ability, and cognitive support for sequencing daily tasks	• Engaging with purposeful and meaningful activities • Presentation of food and liquid • Behavior management including validation, reflective listening, and redirection	• Designing meaningful and purposeful activities to decrease isolation and to support interaction • Advise and train on how to modify environments and conversations for communication success • Swallowing assessment and recommendations for safe swallowing strategies and diet textures

Late Stages - Considerations



Therapy becomes more indirect, focusing more on education, counseling, and training family and care providers



People in every stage of dementia, even those who are non-verbal, remain aware of the connectedness that happens through communication and interaction.