

Good Conversations with People with Dementia

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Getting Things Changed

Introduction and background

Our research was about interactions with people with dementia, and it was part of a large project, 'Getting Things Changed' at the University of Bristol. We worked with the Forget Me Not group from Swindon, and we collected almost 10 hours of video data, mainly in group settings with 28 people with dementia. We used Conversation Analysis to analyse data, in order to find out how routine ways of interacting might be adapted in these settings.

Findings and Recommendations



Keeping eye contact: is this 'good listening'?

People often talk about keeping eye contact as a 'top tip' for communicating. But in conversation people do not naturally stare at each other. It is usual to look elsewhere when talking. We saw how active listening included nodding, eye gaze and short verbal feedback turns, which all work together to help another person carry on talking.

Sharing stories: more equality in talk

In dementia groups people are often asked about their own past lives. That worked better when their conversation partner shared related things they were interested in. Here Lisa and Tom are looking at guitar music:

Lisa: So, *(pause)* could you play the- can you still- are you still practising with the guitar? Tom?

Tom: Yeah

Lisa: Oh wow *(.)* that's a real skill isn't it?

Tom: *(says something unclear) (pauses for .7 of a second)*

Lisa: .hhh I had a go a go at guitar lessons but I was never any good at it *(laughs)*

Tom: that's one thing I can do

Taking Time

The first thing the Forget Me Not group members said was that other people need to give them more time. Leaving a gap allows the other person to get in, but not all gaps are equal. The following took place in a day centre quiz, where 'Richard' was put on the spot and couldn't respond. Such a long pause allowed him to speak again, but it was not successful because he'd got stuck.

Supporter: Moving on. Richard. Can you think of an animal beginning with P *(Someone else in the group responds, and Richard hesitates)*

Richard: Rhino? *(2 second pause)*

Supporter: Not quite have another go



Laughing together

Jokes can be very sensitive. People have the right to make a joke about themselves, but do not want to be 'laughed at'. Joining in jokes started by a person with dementia was more successful. Staff also sometimes made jokes about themselves.