



What to Say When Your Loved One...

A Behavior Script & Quick-Help Sheet for Dementia Caregivers

Simple phrases that reduce fear, not fuel it.

When dementia changes how someone sees or understands the world, logic often stops working — but connection still matters.

This guide isn't about saying the perfect thing. It's about choosing words that lower distress, protect trust, and help you both get through the moment.

Ground Rule:

In moments of confusion or fear:

- Correcting often escalates
- Arguing rarely reassures
- Validation buys time and safety

BEHAVIOR SCRIPTS (THE HEART OF IT)

When Your Loved One Is Hallucinating

(Seeing, hearing, or sensing things you don't)

Avoid saying:

- “That’s not real.”
- “You’re imagining things.”
- “There’s nothing there.”

Try instead:

- “That sounds upsetting. I’m here with you.”
- “I don’t see it, but I believe you’re scared.”
- “You’re safe right now.”

Why this works:

You’re validating the emotion, not confirming the hallucination.

When Your Loved One Accuses You (Stealing, cheating, hiding things, lying)

Avoid saying:

- “I would never do that.”
- “You’re wrong.”
- “Why would I do that?”

Try instead:

- “It sounds like you’re really worried.”
- “Let’s figure this out together.”
- “I can see this feels very real to you.”

Why this works:

Accusations often come from fear, not belief.

When Your Loved One Forgets

(Plans, facts, conversations, recent events)

Avoid saying:

- “I already told you.”
- “You just asked that.”
- “You should remember.”

Try instead:

- “That’s okay — let me tell you again.”
- “I’m glad you asked.”
- “We can talk about it as many times as you need.”

Why this works:

- Memory loss is not defiance — it’s neurological.

When Your Loved One Thinks You’re Someone Else

(Capgras, misidentification, confusion)

Avoid saying:

- “I’m your wife/husband.”
- “Look at me — you know me.”
- “Stop saying that.”

Try instead:

- “You’re safe with me.”
- “Tell me about who you’re looking for.”
- “I’m here to help you.”

Why this works:

Safety matters more than identity in these moments.

QUICK CALMING TOOLS

In-the-Moment Reset (Caregiver)

- Pause before responding
- Lower your voice
- Slow your movements
- Breathe out longer than you breathe in

| You are regulating two nervous systems, not just one.

WHEN THIS KEEPS HAPPENING...

| If behaviors are becoming frequent or intense, this isn't about doing better — it's about getting support.

Next Gentle Steps:

- ▶ *Understanding “Showtiming” in Medical Settings*
- ▶ *How to Communicate What You See to Doctors*
- ▶ *Caregiver Compass: Learning the Terrain*