

The Caregiver's Language Guide

What to Say & What Not to Say

United Believers Community Church | Care Ministry Edition

This guide is for family caregivers walking through memory loss, dementia, and the weight that comes with caring for someone you love. It offers language for the hardest moments — words to lean on, and words to gently set aside — whether you're talking to your loved one, your family, your church family, or yourself. The words we choose can either open the door to help or quietly close it.

1. When You Think Something Is Wrong

“She's not herself anymore.” | “He keeps losing his keys — and his words.”

X Don't Say	✓ Instead Say
Oh, that's just normal aging.	I'm really glad you said that out loud.
My grandma did that too.	You're not imagining it.
She's probably just stressed.	Changes like this are worth taking seriously.
Well, she still recognizes you, right?	Would you like help figuring out next steps?

Why this matters: When the people around you minimize what you're noticing, it can delay evaluation, prayer support, and the help your family needs. Trust what you're seeing — and let others know it's worth taking seriously.

2. When Repetition or Accusations Begin

“She keeps accusing me of stealing.” | “He asks the same question 20 times.”

X Don't Say	✓ Instead Say
You just have to be patient.	<i>That sounds exhausting.</i>
Just correct them.	<i>When memory isn't forming properly, the brain often fills in the gaps.</i>
Tell her she already asked that.	<i>Reassurance usually works better than correction.</i>
That would drive me crazy.	<i>You're not doing anything wrong.</i>

Why this matters: This shifts the conversation from blame to brain-based understanding — so you don't carry shame into the pew or into the home.

3. When Behavior Feels Inappropriate

“He’s making comments that embarrass us.” | “She’s acting completely out of character.”

<i>✗ Don't Say</i>	<i>✓ Instead Say</i>
<i>That's not acceptable.</i>	<i>When the frontal lobe changes, the brain's ability to filter behavior can change.</i>
<i>He knows better.</i>	<i>That doesn't mean we tolerate unsafe behavior — but it helps explain it.</i>
<i>That's just how men are.</i>	<i>Let's talk about safe boundaries and next steps.</i>
<i>You need to shut that down.</i>	<i>This behavior comes from brain changes, not intent.</i>

Why this matters: This preserves the dignity of your loved one and your family while still protecting safety and boundaries.

4. When You Feel Overwhelmed

“I can’t do this anymore.” | “I’m so tired.” | “I feel like I’m failing.”

<i>✗ Don't Say</i>	<i>✓ Instead Say</i>
<i>You're so strong.</i>	<i>This is incredibly hard, and you don't have to carry it alone.</i>
<i>God won't give you more than you can handle.</i>	<i>Even Jesus asked for help in the garden. Caregiver burnout is real, and rest is faithful.</i>
<i>At least she's still here.</i>	<i>You deserve support too — and so does your loved one.</i>
<i>You signed up for this.</i>	<i>Let's look at options before this becomes a crisis.</i>

Why this matters: Well-meaning scripture can land as silencing when you're already at the edge. Caregiving is sacred work — and so is rest. Lean on respite, your church family, and trusted medical and community resources. Faith and help walk together, not apart.

5. When You Suspect a Medical Issue

“He changed overnight.” | “She’s suddenly confused.”

<i>✗ Don't Say</i>	<i>✓ Instead Say</i>
<i>That's just progression.</i>	<i>Sudden changes are worth a medical check.</i>
<i>It's probably the dementia getting worse.</i>	<i>Infections and medication changes can look like dementia — let's rule out anything reversible first.</i>

Why this matters: This protects safety and encourages early medical evaluation. Prayer and a phone call to the doctor are not in competition.

Principles to Hold Onto

- Validate before educating.
- Normalize without minimizing.
- Explain the brain — not the personality, and not the spirit.
- Refer early — to pastoral care and to qualified medical evaluation.
- Let people walk with you; you don't have to fix this alone.

A Simple Script to Remember

1. “I’m glad you told me.”
2. “That sounds really hard.”
3. “This might be related to brain changes.”
4. “Would you like help connecting to support — through our Care Ministry or a medical evaluation?”

If You Remember Nothing Else

- Validate.
- Explain the brain.
- Protect dignity.
- Connect to support.

Prepared for the caregivers of United Believers Community Church.

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