

## The Dementia Communication Difficulties Scale

During a research project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2007, Joan Murphy and Cindy Gray developed the Dementia Communication Difficulties Scale (DCDS) to help identify the communication difficulties that a person with dementia might be having and therefore help carers and staff to understand these difficulties and therefore support the person with dementia. The scale comprises 13 statements that are based on existing definitions of the communication problems commonly experienced by people as dementia progresses (Kempler, 1995; Health Education Board for Scotland, 1996):

In early stage dementia, the person

- may have difficulty coming up with words
- may tend to digress and repeat themselves.

In moderate stage dementia, the person

- may find it hard to understand what is said to them, particularly when being given complex information
- may have difficulty maintaining a conversation topic without losing track
- may use semantically empty words (e.g. thing, stuff) in place of content words
- may be difficult to understand.

In late stage dementia, the person

- may make little sense
- may not be able to understand what is said to them, even when simple language is used
- may often repeat what other people have said to them
- may communicate mainly in non-verbal ways

The DCDS requires a third party who knows the person with dementia well (a paid carer or family member) to assess various aspects of their communication on a 5-option scale. People are asked to circle the option that most closely describes the person in question.

Each DCDS option is assigned a score: for example 'Never' = 0, 'Sometimes' = 1, 'Often' = 2, 'Always' or 'Says too little for me to judge' = 3. A person's DCDS rating is obtained by totalling their scores for all 13 statements. DCDS ratings can therefore range from 0-39, with a higher rating indicating a greater degree of communication difficulty.

The following stages of dementia group definitions were produced:

- DCDS ratings between 0 and 10.5 = early stage
- DCDS ratings between 11 and 19.5 = moderate stage
- DCDS rating between 20 and 39 = late stage.

The Dementia Communication Difficulties Scale is brief, straightforward and quick to complete, and may therefore provide a highly useful tool for the care staff, clinicians and practitioners involved in assessing the needs of people with dementia.

Full details of the development of the DCDS can be found in: <http://www.talkingmats.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Dementia-and-Effectiveness-of-Talking-Mats-full-report1.pdf>

### References:

Kempler, D. (1995). Language Changes in Dementia of the Alzheimer Type. In R. Lubinski (Ed.), *Dementia and Communication*, San Diego: Singular Publishing Group.

Health Education Board for Scotland (1996). *Coping with Dementia: A Handbook for Carers*. HEBS.

## Dementia Communication Difficulties Scale

For each of the following 13 statements, circle the **OPTION** that best describes the person you are thinking about.

If you feel none of the options give an accurate picture of the person, you can put your circle midway between two options (e.g. **SOMETIMES** **OFTEN – 1.5**). Please answer every statement.

0	1	2	3	3
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<b>1) They have difficulty coming up with words</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>2) They are likely to repeat things that they have just said</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>3) They are likely to repeat things that other people have said</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>4) They tend to digress / to go off on a tangent</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>5) They use filler words (e.g. “thing”, “whatsit”) instead of content words (e.g. “pen”, “cooker”)</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>6) They have difficulty understanding simple language</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>7) They have difficulty understanding abstract language (e.g. “Rome wasn’t built in a day”)</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>8) They have problems understanding even single words</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>9) They lose track of what they are saying</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>10) They are difficult to understand</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>11) Their use of pronouns (e.g. “he”, “she”, “they”) is poor</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>12) Their speech makes little sense because they use the wrong words or sounds</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SAYS TOO LITTLE FOR ME TO JUDGE</b>
<b>13) They communicate non verbally (e.g. nodding, smiling, agitation, striking-out)</b>				
<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	