

Staying connected when we are separated from those we love is a challenge. For people living with dementia whose families have geographic or other barriers to visiting, it is especially hard. Hearing the sound of a loved one's voice over the phone is a delight. However, there does come a point where traditional phone calls become a challenge. A person in the later stages may have trouble staying focused on the call, putting down the receiver mid-sentence and walking off. There are so many other things going on in the environment around them, it is hard to stay focused on a disembodied voice.

My friend Masue was born and raised in Hawaii and was Hawaii's first woman dentist. She lived with us at Hale Ku'ike in Honolulu, but her son Jan and daughter-in-law Rebecca lived in Chicago. To keep them connected we set up "FaceTime Friday" video calls. Jan and Rebecca would show Masue their garden and pets and toast her with glasses of wine. If Masue happened to have a glass, she would toast them, too. At the end of every call they would say, "I love you!" and Masue would laugh, shake her head, and wave her hand at them and say, "We are Japanese, we don't need to say that." About six months after moving into Hale Ku'ike, Masue had a sudden stroke. She could open her eyes and speak only a very little bit. We asked them if they would like to FaceTime with her again before they left and they said yes. We put on the headset mic and I held her hand while Jan and Rebecca started talking. She opened her eyes and watched them intently. They let her know they were on their way and that they loved her. Masue had tears in her eyes and said, immediately and clearly, "I love you, too" and squeezed my hand. It was a gift to be able to find a way for them to reach across the miles with love in that moment.

In face-to-face interactions, we have the advantage of being able to use visual, verbal, and touch cues to stay connected. For people living with dementia, it is crucial to bring these three together for effective communication. With help and support, video technology such as Skype and FaceTime, can help bring these three pieces together and bridge the distance for loved ones living apart. Here are some tips for help getting the most out of video connections for people living with dementia.



*** Comfortable and Quiet Environment:** Make sure you have a private space without any ambient noise or visual distractions.

*** Clear Visual Target:** Use a stationary large screen, such as an iPad or laptop instead of a phone. A smart phone held in your hand is a very small visual target, and it is hard to hold still. Sit in the chair yourself first and make binoculars with your hands to see if you can see the center of the screen.

* **Auditory Input and Output Direct and Natural:** Over-ear headsets with a boom microphone work very well. The over the ear covers are comfortable and not an unfamiliar feeling, even for seniors. In ear headsets can be distracting and liable to be pulled out, just like hearing aids often are.

* **Your Supportive Physical Presence:** Be by the person's dominant side to help in case there are any technical problems. You can also provide visual and touch cues, such as pointing and hand holding, during the calls as needed.