



# “Where’s my mother?”



Often, individuals with dementia ask about and search for relatives who are deceased. What should we say to them? Should we tell them the truth? The answers vary by individual, but this guide can help you address these difficult questions.

## Address the underlying emotion:

### What are they really looking for?

- Likely, the person isn’t looking for their mother but rather feelings of security, comfort, safety and familiarity.
- Respond with actions and body language that promote those feelings for the person:
  - Physical touch
  - Active listening
  - A warm blanket or beverage
- Check for and address any underlying causes of distress such as pain, thirst, or need for the restroom.

## Keep it light:

### Try to stay positive and let the moment pass.

- Answer with a supportive response such as, “I’m not sure where your mother is but I’ll try to find out.”
  - Then distract by changing the subject, “I noticed that the sun is finally out- let’s go outside and see what’s happening in the neighborhood.”
- Remember that while the question may evoke strong emotions for us, or make us confused and anxious about how to respond, it may not be the same for the individual with dementia.

## It’s ok to lie:

### Remember that you’re in charge.

- The person with dementia is looking to you for validation that everything is as it should be, and reminding them of a loved one’s death will likely be distressing.
- Supporting feelings of safety and security for the person with dementia is more important than telling them the truth.

## Keep track of what works:

### When you find success in a technique, write it down.

- For example, if distracting the person by looking at pictures of puppies worked last time, use it again the next time a difficult question comes up.
- Over time, you will build a list of things that have worked well and it will be easier to address future occurrences.

## Seek advice:

**Always remember that you have the Seniors At Home team to support you—just ask!**

**Contact Seniors At Home’s Center for Dementia Care**  
**Call 415-449-3700, email [dementiacare@jfps.org](mailto:dementiacare@jfps.org) or visit [seniorsathome.org](http://seniorsathome.org)**