

# Tips for friends

This sheet gives you a few tips on how you can support a friend with dementia and their family. You can make a difference.

“Although our lives are changed forever, there is life after diagnosis. We need our family and friends to walk alongside us as we build a new life.” Nancy, carer

## Tips for families, friends and carers

A person with dementia still experiences all the usual adult emotions, even though their ability to express them may be affected. Here are a few tips about how you can support a friend with dementia.

### 1. Help your friend maintain independence

Support your friend with dementia so they can do as much as they can for as long as possible. Don't take over. Give the person the time and space they need.

### 2. Listen and give time for responses

Give your friend time to search their brain for the word they want to use. Try not to finish their sentences. Just listen and don't let them feel embarrassed if they lose the thread of what they are saying.

### 3. Communicate clearly

If you ask your friend questions, keep to closed ended questions (e.g. with yes/no answers) or ones with obvious answers (e.g. 'Would you like to sit here or sit there?'). Open ended questions (e.g. 'how are you feeling?' or 'what would you like to do today?') can be confusing to a person with dementia.

### 4. Be realistic about memory loss

Your friend will not remember everything, even recent events. Don't be offended if they don't remember something special.

## **How to support a family member**

Caring for a person with dementia can be emotionally and physically stressful. Some family members may be unsure of their own feelings and may believe others cannot understand how they feel.

It is important to remember that ALL members of the family are affected in different ways by their relative's dementia. As a friend, you can do a lot to support them.

### **1. Keep in touch**

Maintain contact. Think of ways in which you can help family members keep up their hobbies or interests. Often family members or carers drop out of activities when a little assistance could help them stay active.

### **2. Do little things – they mean a lot**

You can help with day-to-day things. For example, if you are on your way out to do an errand, check with a family member to see if there's anything they need.

### **3. Give them a break**

Offer to spend time with the person with dementia so family members can do things like shopping, attend a support group, visit a friend or just have some personal time at home.

### **4. Be specific when offering assistance**

Offer practical assistance. Ask the family specifically what they need help with and see if you can assist with jobs such as gardening, cooking, shopping, or find out what is available.

### **5. Be a good listener**

Try to acknowledge the changes the person and their family are experiencing. You don't need to provide answers – just be a compassionate listener. Try not to question or judge but rather support and accept.

## 6. Learn more and get involved

Understanding dementia will help you be a supportive friend. Try to attend one of Dementia Australia's free community information sessions.

### Further Information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at **[dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)**



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**