

Tips for music at home

“Music and songs bear witness to our lives, connecting us to our inner world and giving voice to our experiences.” Ken Brucsia

Tips for families, friends and carers

As the long term memory is activated it restores a sense of ‘remembered self’. Music creates relaxation, a return to fond memories and feelings of calm and security. Music can help reorient the person or be a useful distraction from the stresses of life. It may help to improve a person’s mood.

Here are a few tips on how to use music at home with your friend or relative.

1. Relax together

Music can promote relaxation. There are many different kinds of relaxation music such as nature CDs or classical music compilations of slow and regular movements. Music that is familiar to your friend or relative may often be most effective.

2. Listen together

Find time to sit down and listen together. It doesn’t have to be a long session. Music becomes a vehicle for communication and provides opportunities for sharing and relaxing. Gentle massage of hands, shoulders or feet can become part of a regular ritual. Ask a friend, family member or volunteer to help out if you are too busy.

3. Sing together

Use a sing-along CD or DVD or sing without recorded music. Pick favourite songs to sing together. Sing while assisting your friend or relative in the shower and during other everyday tasks.

4. Move and dance together

Try moving to music – position yourself in front of the person, hold hands and sway from side to side. Dancing together is good, especially if your friend or relative used to enjoy dancing. You don't have to be an expert. Just try moving together while holding hands, or try a traditional ballroom position.

5. Invite friends to visit and perform live

Listen to other people sing or play instruments, particularly children. This is a social activity that your friend or relative with dementia may well enjoy.

6. Get the kitchen band working

Bang with a wooden spoon on a pot in time to some rhythmic music. Invest in a small hand drum, a set of maracas or sleigh bells from your local music shop to add interest. If you feel unsure about playing percussion instruments, ask a primary school child to show you what fun it can be.

7. Attend concerts

If appropriate, try attending concerts if there is a familiar program that your friend or family member will enjoy. Contact your local community centre to find out what's on.

General tips

1. Use repetition

Repetition provides reassurance in a world of increasing confusion.

2. Use reminiscence

Reminiscence is often stimulated by a particular song.

3. Offer simple choices

Offering choices can be very empowering for a person with memory loss but keep it simple and predictable. Give a choice of two songs, dancing or not dancing, music or no music.

4. Be alert to the mood of the day

Check the person's mood on a given day. Some days are better than others.

5. Avoid over stimulation

Be aware that a person can become over-stimulated. Be on the lookout for signs of irritation or agitation.

6. Be alert to possible responses to music

Music can evoke painful as well as pleasurable emotional responses. Music can unlock feelings which cause tears and deeply felt emotions. Notice the responses in the person and in yourself.

7. Focus on the familiar and find the right music

People often relate best to music they heard as a child or as a young adult. Try to identify the person's favourite song from years ago - a hymn, tune, nursery rhyme or song associated with significant people in their life. Try to use and play the genre of music that appeals to their history and cultural background.

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**](http://dementia.org.au)



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