

Coping with placement

This help sheet provides suggestions for families and carers for dealing with their changing role once the person with dementia has moved to a residential care home. It includes practical suggestions for continuing a caring relationship and ways to deal with issues that may arise when visiting.

Continuing to care

When a person with dementia moves into residential care the role of families and carers changes. Many people may choose to stay involved with practical caring tasks such as assisting at mealtimes, others may engage in some of the activities that their loved one is participating in. The level of involvement varies between families and family members.

The person in the care home will receive the best possible care when family members form a positive partnership with staff. Families can actively contribute information about the routines, interests and preferences of the person with dementia and can share in the care arrangements.

Visiting

Visiting is usually very important to both the resident and their family members. It is often the main way that families stay connected with people they care for, even though they may no longer provide the day-to-day caregiving.

The person with dementia may enjoy seeing other members of the family or old friends. Encourage grandchildren to visit. If the children are young prepare a visiting bag that contains treats to keep them entertained. If the residential care home allows it, bring in a pet.

Visiting can sometimes be difficult, especially as the abilities of the person with dementia change. However, there are still simple, enjoyable things you can do that support connection and engagement and provide a positive experience for everyone involved. Try to find some ways to make visiting as pleasurable as possible by thinking of activities that focus on the person's interests and capabilities.

What to try

- Bring newspapers and magazines to look at together
- Play games that have been enjoyed in the past
- Provide access to the person's favourite music
- Read the person's favourite book together or listen to an audiobook
- Watch a well-loved video
- Look at photo albums together
- Help decorate the room with familiar items
- Help with personal grooming – washing or brushing hair, hand massage
- Assist with emailing or writing to friends and relatives

Outings

The person with dementia might enjoy an outing.

What to try

- A short drive in the car, perhaps stopping for afternoon tea in a familiar place
- Socialise with other residents
- A stroll or wheel around the garden

Visiting in the later stages

Find an activity that will draw in as many of the senses as possible – sight, taste, smell, hearing and touch.

What to try

- A gentle kiss or hand holding may be reassuring
- Massaging legs, hands and feet with scented creams or oils may be enjoyable for some people. The scent of perfumes and flowers may also be enjoyed
- A smile, a comforting gaze or a look of affection may often provide reassurance
- Music may provide comfort and familiarity
- Visits from friends and relatives, even though they may not be recognised or remembered, can still provide stimulation and comfort
- Listening to a favourite book or poem being read may be enjoyable
- A stroll around the grounds, even if in a wheelchair, may be enjoyable for both the resident and visitor

There is no right number of times to visit or amount of time to stay. The important thing is to be in the moment and this will help to make each visit as rewarding as possible.

Departing

Leaving after a visit can be a very difficult time for both the person with dementia and their visitors.

What to try

- Take something to do. Once you have finished this it is time to go
- Ask the staff to divert the resident or leave when a meal is about to be served so that there will be something else to do
- Remind the person (sometimes at regular intervals) how long you can stay and why you have to leave. For instance “I can stay for an hour but then I have to go shopping”
- Keep farewells brief and leave straight away. Linger, apologising or staying a little longer can make future farewells even harder

Wanting to go home

A common phrase heard from people with dementia in residential facilities is “I want to go home”. This can be especially upsetting for family and carers.

What to try

- Try to understand and acknowledge the feelings behind the wish to go home
- Reassure the person that they will be safe. Touching and holding can be reassuring
- Reminisce by looking at photographs or by talking about childhood and family
- Try to redirect them with food or other activities such as a walk
- Don't disagree or try to reason with them about wanting to go home

Support

Dementia Australia coordinates a large number of support services throughout Australia. Many people find comfort and practical assistance by taking up these services, some of which are with others who know what it is like to care for a person with dementia.

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



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