

# Tips to plan activities: music

This help sheet gives tips for engaging in music activities with someone who has dementia. Everyone living with dementia is unique, so when reviewing these tips, consider the person's abilities, the impact dementia is having on them and their symptoms.

Music is relaxing. It can encourage fond memories and feelings of calmness and security. It can be a useful distraction from stress and help settle someone who is living with dementia. It may help to improve a person's mood.

Here are some tips on how to enjoy music with your friend or relative.

## 1. Relax and listen together

Often the most effective music to relax someone is music that is familiar to them.

Listening to music together can become a way of communicating. It sometimes helps generate specific memories attached to that music. It can provide an opportunity to introduce gentle movement, clapping hands, tapping feet or provide a relaxing time for massaging of hands, shoulders or feet as part of a regular ritual.

Together you could enjoy many kinds of relaxing and familiar music, including:

- YouTube videos of their favourite artist
- classical music compilations
- radio
- music streaming services
- CDs.

## **2. 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, often prompting them to remember things from the past. Try to find your friend's favourite song from years ago: perhaps from a particular artist or band, a religious song, tune, nursery rhyme or a song associated with significant people or a particular time in their life. Try to use and play the genre of music that appeals to their history and cultural background.

## **3. Sing together**

Try singing along to a familiar song or sing without recorded music. Choose favourite songs to sing together. You might sing while you are helping with everyday tasks such as doing the dishes or having a shower.

## **4. Move and dance together**

Try moving to music together. Position yourself in front of them, 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 have fun moving together.

## **5. Invite friends to take part**

Invite friends who sing or play musical instruments to visit and perform live. You might also have children in the family who enjoy performing music or singing.

You can clap or tap your feet, improvise with household items or simple musical instruments that anyone can use to get involved.

Ask a friend or family member if they can create a collection of music that the person may enjoy.

## **6. Attend concerts or music groups**

Try attending concerts, if there is a familiar singer, band or music group your friend might enjoy. Contact your local community centre or music and choir groups to see what's on.

## General tips

- Creating a routine of familiar activities provides reassurance when someone's world is confusing.
- Offer the choice of a couple of songs or the option to dance: having a choice can be empowering for someone living with dementia.
- We all have some days that are better than others; be aware of the person's mood.
- Understand that someone can be overstimulated, so look for signs of irritation or agitation. Some people living with dementia struggle with noise if it is too loud.
- Be alert to responses to the music, because it can bring up deep emotions for you both: including tears and memories.

## Additional reading and resources

- **Dementia Australia library service**

Visit: [dementia.org.au/library](https://dementia.org.au/library)

- **Family and friends matter**

Visit: [dementia.org.au/resources/family-and-friends-matter](https://dementia.org.au/resources/family-and-friends-matter)

- **Dementia-friendly communities**

Visit: [dementiafriendly.org.au](https://dementiafriendly.org.au)

## Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

**For language assistance: 131 450**

**Visit our website: [dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)**