

Tips for caring from a distance

This help sheet considers some of the issues you may face when you live a long distance from a family member, relative or friend with dementia and you are unable to make as regular direct contact as you would wish. Families, carers and friends can still make valuable contributions despite the barrier of distance.

Whether you live on the other side of town, in a city or rural community, interstate or overseas you can still support a person with dementia. There are ways to overcome some of the challenges of caring from a distance. It requires you to be organised and think of ways to overcome the distance barrier.

Below are some tips you may find useful.

1. Be prepared

Develop a plan for staying in touch with the person living with dementia and those who are providing care.

Ways you can help would be to:

- be in regular contact and offer support
- seek up-to-date information on the person's welfare
- help resolve problems or crises
- make phone calls, video calls and personal visits when you can.

Learn about the type of dementia the person has. It will help you be more supportive. It may help when talking with family, friends and caregivers who live closer and provide support.

2. Keep the communication going

Stay in touch and let the person with dementia know that you care.

Consider sending:

- postcards
- photos
- short letters
- small gifts
- flowers.

With phone and video conferencing calls:

- Establish a routine so you call at around the same time of day.
- Be aware of the person's engagement level; allow them time to answer your questions.
- If verbal communication becomes increasingly difficult, video calls may be helpful.
- Understand that information provided to you by the person may sometimes be inaccurate.
- Sometimes what appears to be a problem or crisis may not always be. It could be their way of expressing their anxiety or confusion, so have a plan for dealing with these situations.

3. Build a caring support network

Other people can help you. Tips for building a caring support network:

- Arrange support through family, friends, groups or counsellors.
- Try to establish a good relationship with a family member or friend who lives nearby.
- Arrange family meetings to discuss and establish roles and responsibilities. Try working together to agree on changed circumstances that might require major decisions.
- Ask local people to be supportive observers.
- Arrange regular visiting, meals, social contact or transport through the local council, clubs, dementia-specific social support day programs or religious groups.

- Develop a relationship with staff if the person lives in residential care, so they will know when to keep you informed.
- Call the **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500** for advice.

4. Visit when you can

Try to arrange your visits to give local family and friends some respite from caring and keep in touch through regular phone calls, video calls or email.

If the person lives in residential care and you can visit occasionally, allow time to meet with staff and caregivers after your visit. Ask for feedback and provide them with your observations.

5. Anticipate and plan

Try to anticipate what types of support the person may need to keep safe and maintain their independence and wellbeing.

If possible, make plans together. This will help ensure their wishes are carried out in a way they would like.

You might:

- write a list of support services available in the area
- ask the person to nominate a trusted family member or friend to be ‘power of attorney’ for legal, financial and medical decision-making
- redirect mail to someone with legal authority to receive and respond to mail or pay bills
- get consent to talk to the person’s doctor or My Aged Care about support needs, assessments, and care strategies

If the person is unable to participate in planning and decision-making, seek the support of family members or trusted persons.

6. Look after yourself

It is not always possible to be with the person you love all the time.
Know that you can make a difference.

Additional reading and resources

- **Dementia Australia library service**

Visit: dementia.org.au/library

- **Family and friends matter**

Visit: dementia.org.au/resources/family-and-friends-matter

- **7 tips for looking after yourself**

Visit: discrimination.dementia.org.au/supporting-someone/7-tips-for-carer-self-care/

- **Dementia-friendly communities**

Visit: 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