

## **TIPS FOR VISITING PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA**

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**Dementia is a disease. People have this disease. One of the symptoms of this disease is that the people who have it can no longer learn new information, remember things after a few minutes or in some cases remember past information.**

**Every waking moment is a “first” time experience. It is the first time they have met you, every time you come to see them. If their surroundings are not a place where they have lived for a long time, every time they wake up, they are seeing the place for the first time. Remember how you felt when you first woke up in a strange bed or a hotel room. Every action, place and person they meet each day is new to them.**

- 1. Greet them with a smile.**
- 2. Treat them as the friend you feel they are or person that you know and tell them your name and why you are there.**
- 3. Wear bright, appropriate clothes so that you can be seen. Blues and greens tend to look the same - a grey color.**
- 4. The person with dementia sometimes has trouble understanding words and as such they tend to dependent upon what they see - use gestures when speaking,**

**People with dementia depend upon their emotions for survival. They will look to you for cues on how they should behaviour or respond. People with dementia will reflect back to you whatever emotions you are feeling. The people with dementia are a mirror or reflection of the emotions you are feeling.**

- 1. Smile.**
- 2. Be calm and relaxed.**
- 3. Speak clearly, in small sentences and give them time to respond.**

**Due to changes in the brain, the person with dementia can only relate to what is in front of them NOW. For many it is hard to pull forward memories, identify people and things and as such is unable to understand or plan for the future. It means they do not have the ability to manipulate.**

- 1. Be the entertainer or host. Come with things to discuss, look at or show. Stimulate their senses to help them make connections to things. Like smelling a flower, or holding a stone, chewing on some cookies, etc.**
- 2. If possible go for a walk and talk about the things you can see, or hear. Whatever they do, is the best that they can do at that time.**
- 3. Use gestures when speaking, and be alert to your tone of voice and facial expressions.**
- 4. Watch for cues from the person with dementia to see if they are upset or whether you should stay to visit. Things to look for are tight fists, walking away from you, ignoring you, telling you to go away or pushing past you. It is hard to not take this personally but they are trying to tell you that they are tired and need to rest.**

**If you have trouble leaving because the person with dementia won't let you go, give the person something to do to distract them while you leave. Sometimes it is best not to tell them you are going home, because they will want to go with you.**

- 1. Because of memory loss the person with dementia feels like a visitor in the facility and if you are going to that wonderful place called home, they would like to go there too. Tell them you are going to see someone else and that you will come back to see them at another time. Reassure them that you will come back again.**

**Sometimes, things happen before your visit and the person with dementia is upset. They are not upset with you but may say harsh things. It is best to leave them for a time and then visit them later. Even ten minutes can make a difference or come another day.**

The person with dementia is only able to “live in the moment”. That is they can only talk about things that they see, hear or feel, right now.

1. Take them outside for walks – there is more to see and comment on.
2. Watch for tiredness, like repeating conversations, irritability, or walking away from you or asking you to leave. A short visit is better than a long visit because everything they do is hard work for them.
3. Silence can be shared. Just sitting and watching is good. As well as reading to them, or even holding your knitting yarn while you knit.
4. Distraction is drawing their attention to something different. If they become upset, draw their attention to something else – You can not take things from them without giving them something to replace it.

*A Successful Visit:*

*Success is in sharing an experience with the person with dementia. Just having them know they are not alone.*

*Success is enjoying the “moments of reality” they experience and the comments that they can make so appropriately.*

*Success is seeing them smile and knowing that your visit is leaving them with a good feeling.*

[www.dementicare.ca](http://www.dementicare.ca)



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