

Understanding Changes in Behaviour in People Living With Dementia during Coronavirus Outbreak



COVID-19



Physical Health

Changes in physical health contribute to changes in behaviour and emotional wellbeing.

The following should be considered but this is not an exhaustive list.

Is the person in pain?



Do they have an infection?



Are they experiencing a delirium?



Are they dehydrated, hungry, hot or cold?



Are they constipated, incontinent or need to use the toilet?



Do they wear glasses and hearing aid, are these up to date and working?



Does their medication need to be reviewed?



Do they have any long term health conditions which need to be reviewed?

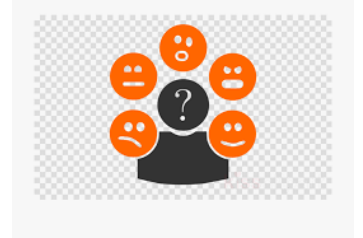


Communication



The person with dementia is likely to mirror your mood and behaviour.

Fear can be contagious!



Try to remain calm, smile and remain positive when talking or offering support.

Even if you are wearing a mask, the person can see the smile in your eyes.

Every time you meet the person, say hello, tell them your name and what your role is.



“Hello SadieIt’s ClareI’m the nurse”

Show them your name, picture of your role and the smiley face if you have these.

- Use short, simple sentences.
- Give the person time to process what you have said and respond (10 seconds).
- Listen to what they are saying.
- Give positive instructions ‘Shall we go here?’ instead of ‘Don’t go there’.



Their reasoning may be affected by dementia. Arguing, disagreeing or correcting may lead to frustration.

Asking to go home

The person may not recognise the people or things around them as familiar. They may be confused and anxious about where they are.



Home is not just a building. It's a feeling of safety and security, and the people and memories associated with the building.

When someone asks to go home they are looking for the feelings of comfort, safety and security that home brings.

If family and other familiar people are not visiting or there are changes in staff, the person may experience this even more.



Support:

- Telling the person that they are at home may add to their confusion and distress.
- Ask if they are missing their son/daughter/husband/wife/significant other.
- Engage them in conversation about that person.
- Support them to look at photographs if available. This may help the person to experience familiarity, connection and feel safe and secure.
- If possible, ensure there are personal objects and photographs in their room.



Attempting to leave

The person may not recognise where they are and want to go home.



They may believe they have somewhere important to be, for example going to work or collecting children from school.

They may miss and worry about family members or significant others, especially as they have not been able to visit.

If they are prevented from leaving, they will worry about what will happen and their level of distress will escalate.

Support:

- Asking the person to come and sit down or telling them they cannot leave is unlikely to help.
- Find out where the person wants to go.
- Acknowledge how they might be feeling, for example, “You’re worried about your childrenLet’s see if we can find out where they are”
- Ask them to walk with you, ask them to help you to do something.
- Purposeful activity will reduce the person’s need to leave.
- If the person is asking to go to work, tell them that they do not have to go to work today but you need them to help you with jobs.



Asking for family members or significant others



A person with dementia may have a poor concept of time and feel like they haven't seen family members for a long time. This will be even more difficult during a time when family cannot visit. Where possible, maintain contact by phone, or video calls.

When they ask about someone it means they are thinking about that person and may be missing them.

Support:

- Ask if they are missing that person.
- Tell them when the person last visited. Explain where the person is now.
- Spend time reading the letters and cards, listening to voice messages or watching video messages of family and friends.
- Look at photographs of family and friends and engage in conversation about them.
- If the person is occupied with activity they are less likely to become distressed.
- When a person asks about a dead relative. Tell them you understand it is a sad time and you know they are missing the person.
- If telling the truth causes significant ongoing distress, do not continue to remind them that the person has died.



If appropriate, explain that family/friends cannot visit because of the COVID-19.

Personal care

Because of their dementia, the person may not be aware that they need support with personal care and they may be confused and frightened about what is happening.



They may not know who you are or why you are in their personal space. They may be less likely to recognise you if you are wearing a mask.

The person may feel embarrassed, cold or in pain.

Support:

- Say hello and tell the person who you are. Give them time to process what you have said and respond.
- If being supported by multiple carers, only one person should talk at a time.
- Hold out your hand and say “Shall I help you to get out of bed?” or “Shall I help you to get dressed?”
- Provide visual cues about what is happening. For example, show them the towel and face cloth.
- Support with upper body washing/dressing before moving onto the lower half.
- Encourage the person to be as independent as possible, for example, give them the cloth to wash their face and support them to choose an outfit.
- Slow the pace. If the person declines, give them time.
- Keep the person covered as much as possible to keep them warm and protect their dignity.



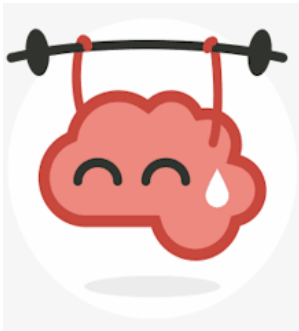


Walking with purpose

When a person walks (sometimes referred to as wandering or pacing) they are either going somewhere, looking for someone, wanting to do something or simply want to get some exercise.

This will be more likely if the person has to stay in their room because of the need to self-isolate.

When you see someone walking, ask them if there is something they need. If they cannot use language, pictures may help.



Exercise seeker:

- Playing 'football' with a large ball
- Dancing to lively music
- Utilising garden areas
- If possible go for a walk with them.



Busyness seeker:

- Rummage boxes (objects you can easily sanitise)
- Encourage them to sort their draws and wardrobe
- Try activities that may be related to previous routines.



Reassurance seekers:

- Think about providing 1:1 time
- Playing a voice recording/video of a loved one
- Try to make the room space homely
- TV programs and music they enjoy.

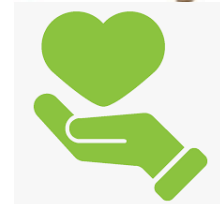
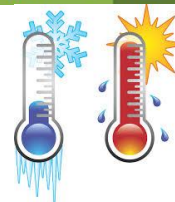


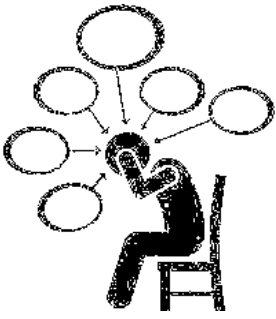
Sleep problems

Dementia can cause disruption of the sleep wake cycle.

The person may fall asleep easily during the day but find it difficult to get to sleep at night.

- Assess for physical health changes which may be disrupting sleep.
- Orientate the person to the time throughout the day.
- Reduce daytime naps and avoid caffeine in the evening.
- Ensure there is good light during the day and it is sufficiently dark at night.
- Ensure the person's bedroom is not too cold or not too hot.
- Ensure their bed is suitable and they have comfortable night wear.
- If the person experiences vivid dreams, nightmares or hallucinations at night, listen to them and provide reassurance.
- It can sometimes help to support the person out of their room for a short time.





Anxiety

Anxiety may escalate during the COVID-19 pandemic as the person knows that something is wrong and is missing their usual routine and visitors.

Anxiety can make someone feel upset, irritable, cause difficulty concentrating and sleeping, cause them to sweat, feel dizzy and experience heart palpitations or panic attacks.

The person may seek frequent reassurance from carers, other residents or care staff.

Support:

- Telling someone not to worry or calm down usually doesn't help.

- Support the person to a quieter area if they are distressed.



- Talk to the person and ask them what is upsetting them. Acknowledge how they feel, for example "It sounds like you are feeling worried."
- A person with dementia may mirror and reflect your mood and behaviour. If you appear anxious, this may cause the person to feel even more anxious.



- Be patient with the person. A warm, positive and friendly approach will help.



Supporting Meaningful Occupation

- How we spend our day affects how we feel and how we behave.
- Activity gives our day structure, occupies us and gives purpose and meaning to life.
- Write the daily plan on a white board that is in view. Tick off each activity when it has finished.

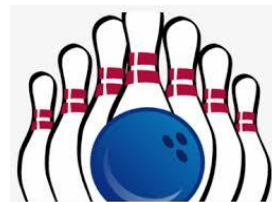
Examples of some activities:

Singing and listening to music.



Play music and ask residents to “name that song”.

Play skittles or bowls with a plastic ball. (Disinfectant after each use).



Choose some objects and pictures of famous people and engage in reminiscence.



Play a game of colour bingo.



Set up a gardening station at a table.



