



Connecting with someone special

Tips and advice to help you care for yourself and help make a difference in the life of someone who is living with dementia.

**Dementia Support
Australia**

Funded by the Australian Government
A service led by HammondCare

**Staying
at Home**

A Carer Wellbeing & Respite Program



People living with dementia often become isolated in our community. Spending time getting to know older relatives, neighbours or new connections through volunteering can be an enriching experience for both parties.

If you are planning to make a connection with a person living with dementia, we hope that these tips will make your time together more enjoyable and rewarding.

With time, patience and understanding, you can become someone special in the life of a person with dementia.

Start by listening

When you really listen carefully to what a person has to say, it is a way of saying “you are important to me and I care about you”. So taking the time to sit with a person with dementia, and allowing them to speak at their own pace, and to say the things that are important to them, is a first step in really connecting.

Even if stories are repeated, listening and responding to emotion is important and is often a great pleasure!

Encourage reminiscing

Like everyone else, a person living with dementia needs the opportunity to talk about important roles in their family and in the community and about significant happenings in their lives. Experts agree that it is good to encourage older people to talk about their past.

You may have noticed that many older people talk more about the distant past than about recent events. When memory is failing it is often easier to remember distant events.

Being gently curious about an older person's life can reveal surprising differences in life experiences. This perspective may provide you with rich reflective material about the nature of change.



**We're here to help, 24 hours a day,
365 days a year.**



The 5 S's

Sometimes people living with dementia have memory problems or difficulty hearing. These tips will help you get your message across.

Slow

Slow down your rate of speech and wait for the person to respond (this can take some time and it is helpful to learn about being comfortable with silence)

Simple

Keep what you say simple - one idea at a time, using short sentences.

Specific

Talk about specific people, objects or events they may remember. Use names (John, Mary) instead of pronouns (he, she).

Show

Use gestures, point to items, use visual examples such as photographs, or show choices...if you are saying "would you like to wear the blue cardigan?", show the cardigan.

Smile

Facial expressions can be understood long after verbal language is lost. Send a message with a smile!

Don't rush to give advice

Most of us don't welcome unrequested advice.

People living with dementia are no different - so it's best not to rush to give advice or express your opinion. Instead, ask them for their advice or opinions. Each of us can feel useful and value when we are asked about our insights and perspectives.

You could also ask them about activities or hobbies that they were proud of - pruning the roses, fixing the car, cooking a meal. For people with failing memories, ask simple questions they may be able to answer.

Share news and information

If appropriate, share news about your family, the community, and the wider world with the person living with dementia you are spending time with.

Be mindful of the nature of your relationship and the resilience of the person living with dementia when you are sharing news and personal information.

Reading and listening to music

On one of your visits you could bring some newspapers or magazines, or a couple of books.

You and the person you are visiting could look at them together, or you could both just sit and read. If your older friend has a vision impairment, you could spend time reading to them. This can be a wonderful experience that creates a special bond.

Your friend may remember favourite books or stories from their youth and they will enjoy hearing them again.

Ask the person about what type of music they like to listen to. It is likely that music from much younger days will have a special resonance for the person. You can learn more about engaging with music at www.musicfordementia.com.au



Playing games

Try bringing cards, dominoes or other board games to play together. Crosswords can also be a great way to spend time. A familiar activity is often a less demanding way to connect and enjoy companionship with another person.

Handy wellbeing tips

Tick the tips you did this week.

Daily exercise. Your mind and body will benefit.

Good sleep is vital to wellbeing. Poor sleep increases the risk of being unwell.

Have you nourished your body today? Try and maintain a balanced diet.

Feeling tired? Coffee is great but water is better. Dehydration can make you feel sluggish.

Text a friend, make a call, make time for a friend, join an online forum. Remaining connected with friends and family is important.

If you can, carve out some time alone to read, sit in the sun, or have a warm shower.

Stay curious about the world. Learn something new just for the fun of it.

Make time for creativity even if you think you're not creative. Whether it be writing, painting, singing, music making, cooking, craft or knitting, your brain and soul will thank you.

Pay attention to your thoughts. Speak to yourself like you would to a good friend.

Practice mindfulness, be in the moment and pay attention to what you can hear, see, smell, taste, touch. All we have is the current moment.

Allow some space each day to write down your thoughts and feelings. Putting it all out on paper helps you process and move forward.

Spend some time outdoors. A drive into nature can change your mental landscape.

Focus on your breathing when you feel overwhelmed. Take five deep, long breaths in, breath out slowly. This can calm your mind.

Create a quiet moment and pay attention to the sounds around you. Turn off the TV, radio and phone to enjoy silence.

Never forget the power of an embrace. A hug can really help you feel connected and can communicate better than any words.

Take a moment to create a clean and simple environment at home. Getting rid of old items and keeping only what matters can help you feel organised and calm.

Ask for help. People want to help, they're just waiting for permission.

Feeling cooped up at home? Take a walk or drive and listen to your favourite music. A change of environment can energise you.

Find pleasure in the mundane, feel the texture and smells as you fold clean towels, feel the warmth of the water as you wash dishes. Paying attention to each moment can be calming.

Dementia help and resources

Dementia Support Australia

Call our free nationwide service on 1800 699 799, for advice and support - 24/7, 365 days a year.

Visit dementia.com.au for resources.

Need more help?

Sometimes we need a little more help with our mental health or someone to talk to.

The following helplines may be useful:

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636
- 13YARN 13 92 76
- MensLine 1300 78 99 78
- Griefline 1300 845 745
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467
- Friend Line if you're feeling lonely 1800 424 287
- Mind spot (not an emergency service) 1800 61 44 34
<https://www.mindspot.org.au/>

Further tailored mental health support can be organised by contacting your GP and discussing a mental health treatment plan.

About Dementia Support Australia

**Dementia
Support
Australia**

When a person living with dementia is experiencing changes to their behaviour, we work with you to understand the causes – and help you improve their quality of life.

Every person is different, and so are their needs. Our goal is to provide carers and their care network with the tools to better understand the causes of behaviour in people living with dementia.

With over 400 dementia consultants, we bring together industry-wide expertise, build sector capacity and create partnerships for better dementia care around the country.

Our nationwide service recognises the individual experiences of people living with dementia and recommends the ideal service for each person.

To learn more visit dementia.com.au

Staying at Home program

**Staying
at Home**
A Carer Wellbeing & Respite Program

Staying at Home is a free carer wellbeing and dementia respite program designed to empower and upskill carers to support a person living with dementia to remain at home for as long as possible.

With a strong focus on wellbeing and self-care, carers will be equipped to navigate the complexities and challenges of supporting a person living with dementia. As part of the program, the person living with dementia is offered an introduction to dementia respite and receives tailored, individual support to continue meaningful and enjoyable activities for longer.

Designed as an overnight retreat, carers and people living with dementia come together in a supportive peer environment.

To learn more visit dementia.com.au/dsa-staying-at-home

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If found please contact:

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dementia.com.au

A printed version of this
resource including additional
templates can be ordered at
resources.dementia.com.au

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